MARSHFIELD THE OBSERVER

by

EGERTON CASTLE

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Marshfield the Observer & the Death-Dance

MARSHFIELD
THE OBSERVER

&

The Death-Dance

STUDIES OF CHARACTER & ACTION

BY

EGERTON CASTLE

AUTHOR OF "THE PRIDE OF JENNICO," "YOUNG APRIL," "CONSEQUENCES," ETC., ETC.

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FOREWORD

CONCERNING MARSHFIELD THE OBSERVER

If there happen, among my readers, to be any who recollect an early book of mine, "La Bella and Others," they may possibly recall one particular tale in that collection, "The Baron's Quarry," in which a certain Marshfield figures as teller of the story and as Choros in the development of its action.

The same personage plays a similar part in most of the present tales.

His was a curious, or at least a very unusual personality. I say was, for although I have no positive proof of his disappearance from this world, it is already a very long time since I have seen or heard anything of him.

Among the many classes into which it would be possible to divide intellectual characteristics, there are two very broad ones, especially antithetical. There are the men whose main energies tend ever towards action and creation; towards doing and producing. And there are those whose great and all-sufficient hap-

piness is to study, to know; who revel in observation and theory; who thesaurise knowledge for its bare sake, unproductively, even as the miser thesaurises means of wealth for no ulterior purpose. Marshfield was one of these latter.

I had known him ever since my now distant university days, and never met at any time a more promising subject. The great brain power of the man and his truly marvellous capacity for digesting and assimilating knowledge, were of the kind which should have led him in life, through the portals of brilliant degrees, to the very acme and pitch of any profession. He might have selected any line he pleased, artistic, literary, legal, scientific; what not? On leaving college he was equipped for a fair start in any career. His knowledge of art, for instance, being so young a man, was truly wonderful. A classical scholar and master of many modern tongues, he was armed not only with an exact understanding of all accepted philological discoveries, but with theories of his own which, had he chosen to work them out, would undoubtedly have made his name famous. The same, in his case, might have been augured of natural sciences, or law. Yet, as years fell away, he never rose from the status of mere student and theorist. Never was such a man for "getting up," as the

jargon has it, an out-of-the-way subject, but there his energies stopped; when he had secured it, he fairly revelled for a time in the new-acquired knowledge for all its practical uselessness, even as the collecting maniac revels in the possession of some rare, if intrinsically worthless, bibelot. He was, so to speak, an Intellectual Miser. But never, from the moment he had emerged from his status pupillaris, did the fellow make the slightest attempt to increase his small (but, happily for him, settled) income by any profitable pursuit.

Among his intimates he was long known (for all the prodigious amount of work he had always on hand) as the Idler; which, hearing one day, he mildly corrected, with some complacency, to the Observer. And the sobriquet cleaved to him. Indeed, as some men succumb to a passion for sport, and others to one for gambling or dissipation, Marshfield, once absolutely his own master, became more than ever a prey to this lust of unregulated study and investigation.

When we fell in together again, some years after our college days, I found that the unconventional (and, in consequence, somewhat unpopular) undergraduate had already developed into a decided eccentric. But, oddly enough, he had become an accepted person;

something even of a favourite, at least in certain circles.

His only permanent dwelling was a small set of rooms, attics in the dingiest and ghostliest corner of old Clifford's Inn. There, during the intervals between fitful flittings, mysterious and sudden disappearances, he lived like a sort of rat-in-a-cheese, surrounded by untidy masses of books, papers and incomprehensible collections of odds and ends, evidently fraught for the moment with absorbing interest.

A curious-looking creature was this prematurely old-looking young man. Broad-headed, small-mouthed and large-eyed; with no hair on his sallow face but singularly marked eyebrows, which contrasted oddly with a very thin and pointed black moustache; with an utterly unemotional countenance, he recalled at the very first sight the physiognomy of an experienced and philosophical tom-cat. The impression was strengthened by a narrow chest and stooping shoulders which, in repose, irresistibly suggested the humpy and tucked-up attitude of the meditative grimalkin. And, like those of that absorbingly selfish and observant creature, his eyes, though wide and clear, were singularly unexpressive.

Bodily, it were difficult to imagine a less vigorous-looking personality; thin-armed, thin-thighed, with hands and feet shapely

enough but much too small, with pale cheeks and bloodless lips, he might have stood forth as a type of the great disinherited of manhood. He undoubtedly passed for such among those who knew him little. And yet a stronger constitution I never knew of. It is not on record that he was ever ill, or even indisposed. There was apparently no wear and tear in the man—an instance which would seem to point out that the chief source of vital waste is to be sought in emotional life. For, whereas with most of us the greatest luxury of mental vigour is to achieve and to give out, with this cold-souled being the height of delight was reached when he had mastered a new conception, taken unto himself a new entity—that sufficed. To his haunting curiosity a new, fully-realised, mental image was as satisfying as a personal experience.

No one, not even I, his most intimate, ever knew anything positive of Marshfield's private life. In its own way it was decidedly epicurean, but everything points to the conclusion that he was singularly devoid of the cardinal human passions—Love, Hatred, and Ambition. I believe he was incapable, certainly not desirous, of experiencing the rack or the joy of them personally. Yet I never came across a "neurotic subject" who could appreciate more exactly the yearning or ecstasy of Love, or the

lust of Hate; but, like Ambition, that load-star of vigorous lives, all this was simply an abstract, if well-defined, conception.

I have called him an Intellectual Miser, rejoicing in, but making no use of, his constant acquisitions. The simile is apt in yet another sense. Just as the miser jealously ascertains the genuineness of his new treasure before locking it up and looking out for another, Marshfield always took measures to ascertain whether any freshly-acquired stone in the mosaic of his encyclopædic knowledge was perfect at all points. And his method in so doing was original.

I forget which philosopher said: "Wouldst thou acquire some knowledge, read; more exact knowledge, write; quite exact knowledge, teach!" Now, it did not enter into Marshfield's independent scheme of life to teach, in the regular sense of the word. Moreover what, in such circumstances, he would have had to teach would rarely have proved of sound educational value. But, to suit his end, he worked on lines which afforded the didactic opportunities he required.

When, after a more or less prolonged retreat, either "in his own cheese" up in his Inn chambers, or in the reading-room of the British Museum, he felt his mind as full of his new-chosen subject as the oft-quoted egg is full of

meat, he would waylay some devoted friend in some likely spot. This might be in his own rooms, or a club corner, over a cigar. There, with pertinacious sagacity, he would shape the course of converse to the subject at hand, and regardless of all deprecation, expatiate from Alpha to Omega on the selected topic. It was, truly, like the process of "forcing" a card. As, however, his monologues (under the ostensible flag of discussion) were beyond doubt marvels of clearness, he almost invariably achieved his purpose.

In this manner, and often at the oddest times and places, I was on innumerable occasions seized upon and made the "corpus vile" on which to try the "experimentum" which was to prove the complete acquisition by Marshfield of some preposterous subject of investigation. It might be The Genesis of the Straight Line, based on the Theory of Linkages; or The Life-purpose of the Earthworm in Soil Transformation; or The Existence of Aryan Races in Peru; or yet again new theories concerning The Imitative Tendencies of Orchid-forms . . . Que sais-je!

I knew Marshfield's peculiar way of ringing at my door, and his stealthy step on my stair. And when I heard the sound (mostly of an evening when I had reckoned upon a quiet spell of musing or work of my own) I knew

also that my fate was to endure several hours of one-sided conversation on topics far removed from my own choosing.

And yet there was an undeniable fascination about the man. He spoke so well! Too well even, for his speech was invariably pedantic; but it compelled attention. He sat, very calm always, half-smiling, smoking one after the other without interval some half-dozen of the best Havanas he expected to find under my roof—and there was no getting him away, or getting away from him, until he had gone through his intended performance. After which he drank his stirrup-cup, selected his last cigar and departed, satisfied, serene, full of benign theoretical friendship, to show no further sign of life for weeks; sometimes for months.

He was, on the whole, a great solitary. Yet he had the knack of forcing himself into any society that at the time might have an interest for him; and curiously enough he was, as I said, generally looked upon as a decided acquisition.

Marshfield, son of a learned but quite obscure professor at one of the smaller universities and of a well-to-do North Country yeoman's daughter; Marshfield, who even admitted (with some show of interest in the matter) that an unmistakable strain of Gipsy blood ran in his veins,

had no claim to the invidious degree of lineage and ancestry. But nowadays, to the great benefit of the modern nation, birth is only one and by no means an indispensable factor of the status of a gentleman; and Marshfield the scholar, with the speech and bearing of the highly-cultured, with the quiet manners of the independent-minded, self-reliant man, sufficiently attentive to the importance of suitable garb on all occasions, Marshfield, eccentric as he was, never seemed out of place in any society.

There is no denying, however, that had it not been for the fact that he was, after all, a man of comfortable private means, he might have passed, when he moved away from his own den, for something like a chartered parasite. There was nothing of the "client" or lap-dog about the man; but it never occurred to him to dread the position of what the French pithily call pique-assiette. When it suited his purpose to establish his dwelling in the mansion of some kindly host, he did so in the quiet, uncompromising, absolutely detached manner of the domestic cat he otherwise resembled, without ever considering the possibility of outlasting his welcome, so long as the place pleased him. And if he was never greatly loved, he was always tolerated. He was a character, was such a useful talker, so full of

information; had, for instance, such a prodigious memory for "chapter and verse" ready against any case in point. He was, in short, like Dominie Sampson, a sort of literary dumb-waiter. But above all, he was a harmless, unobtrusive, unsophisticated fellow, so every one said.

Such was the character Marshfield bore in society! It may readily be realised what a coign of vantage a reputation of that kind could afford a man, one of whose main delights in life was the scanning and analyzing of "human documents."

I have said that Marshfield was a creature of essentially cold temperament, dispassionate and speculative. No one has ever known him to be in love, for instance, or to care for beauty otherwise than in an artistic, critical manner; or to evince anything approaching to enthusiasm and warmth of heart. But it might almost be said that his interest in psychological display among his fellow men—in the action and reaction between human character and outside events—was all the keener for being so impersonal. To him the observation of a chain of passional episodes could be as congenial a scientific or critical exercise as the study of a microscopic slide or the deciphering of an occult manuscript.

Now, when, in his excursions into the world,

he had lighted upon one of those innumerable dramas of the soul, which around us come constantly to the surface, like eddies in the ever-flowing stream of life, to swirl awhile, disappear and be replaced by others, he rarely passed the new revelation, duly classified, to his treasury of facts and memories, without taking an opportunity of giving it a finished shape and pleasing to the mood of the moment, and testing it upon some hearer of his own selection.

I, for instance, could fill several volumes with the Observer's stories, were it not that the majority of these were undeniably more suited to the uncompromising realism of a Maupassant than to the reticence of an English pen. The five episodes related in this book, however, are in their variety sufficiently typical of Marshfield's ways of reporting his observations—or rather, as he was fond of calling them, "his cases in point." For the bias of his general trend of thought, whenever he expatiated on human actions, was always felt: no story of incident and passion ever came from his lips but as an exemplification, so to speak, of some broad Law of Nature.

The story of "Mrs. Tollmage," for instance (further strengthened by the account of the married Don Juan, among "The Guests of the Wolfmaster"), was complacently advanced as

an instance of the symmetry of "elective" with chemical affinities.

The history of Edward Dalrymple's hauntings was meant to illustrate a long thesis he had one night argued on the subject of his latest subjects of study—the Dreaming State and Hallucinations, to wit. That night I undoubtedly learned much that was interesting on the theory of "subexpectation" and "psycho-sensorial visualising"—yet not so interesting as the love visions of "Endymion in Barracks," the account of which crowned the evening's converse.

The tale I have called "The Devil's Whisper" is based on one of Marshfield's early student days' reminiscences, brought up on an occasion when (for once more sceptical than my friend himself) I had expressed a doubt of the existence of any "remorse" apart from hidden fear of detection. Marshfield, however, saw in it (among other things) an instance of "unstable equilibrium!" How he worked out the theorem I now forget.

As for the legend of the "Herd-Widdiefow"—which personage I understand to have been one of Marshfield's forbears—it was, in some roundabout way, introduced into a discussion on the characteristics of the many strong races which go to make up what we are pleased to call now the Anglo-Saxon people.

Although I have not seen my friend for a considerable time, it is possible that he may reappear on my path in life at some time or other, fresh from some distant whimsical expedition, and in his usual manner, just as if we had only parted the day before. In such a case it is more than probable that he will have new dramas of his own observing to report. Indeed, as I have often thought, Marshfield, like a latter-day Sydney Carton to some modern Stryver, would prove an invaluable "jackal" to a fiction-writing "lion." Most of his succinct stories might easily be used as main themes for fully developed romances or novels. I have, however, preferred to place these on record very much in the form they assumed when they came to be told; and merely qualified in the retelling by the literary mood of the moment.

"The Death Dance" is a "true story" of the Hungarian Home Rule War of 1849. Although many of the characters who figured in that almost incredible episode are still living, at this distance of time I have not thought it necessary to disguise the Hungarian localities and patronymics in any way, and but very slightly the English names themselves.

MRS. TOLLMAGE

Mrs. Tollmage

We were a small but sufficient party in the snug alcove end of the club smoking-room. We had arrived at the first *petit verre*, and were thinking of our second course of smoke, when there entered upon us Marshfield.

Now there is, as I have said, not a single topic of discussion, scientific, literary, artistic, social, or merely fanciful, about which this singular being ever fails to set forth blandly some novel line of discussion. His egotistic mastery in the art of bringing dialogue (even among men who, like ourselves, essentially resent all tendency to "pontifying") exactly, and withal quite naturally, to the starting point he has in view, is a thing delightful to watch.

When he joins, in his mild, stealthy way, in the general talk, the casual stranger would be apt to regard him at first as an unobtrusive young man with a gift of modesty and quite a talent for listening. But those who know him feel no amazement when, presently, the con-

versation frames itself under his guidance to the exact preamble necessary to one of his paradoxical assertions ready for defence at all points, some audacious hypothesis or out-of-the-way tale: and the measured voice ends by wearying all others into silence.

Thus, from my corner, behind the misty breath of a church-warden, it was with both amusement and curiosity that I watched the newcomer softly manipulate the subject of discussion till he had introduced the particular point upon which it was evidently his intention this afternoon to discourse.

"I could give you a case in point," said Marshfield, by-and-by, looking up from the circle of his glass of chartreuse around upon his audience—"an instance of the workings, upon two thinking bodies, of that associating and dissociating force of nature we call affinity, and which is popularly supposed to act only on chemical atoms and molecules.

"You know," added he, after another sip, settling himself down in his chair and to his narration with a leisurely zest that was truly ominous, "that if the ultimate law of Nature be *Harmony* (as no doubt most of us must hold it) then the deduction logical is that human society has not yet emerged from *Chaos*

Harmony in its true sense is the exception in human relations; and that, of course, because we are still plunged in the inevitable incipient state of all things natural. This is what makes the observation of an obvious case of simple working affinity among our fellows, such as I had occasion to witness in the household of my good friend Dr. Tollmage, so very interesting. I do not know whether any one here remembers the incident? It was town talk at one time."

"What, the Tollmage scandal?" asked our reverend antiquary, rising in his chair with an alacrity of interest for which he presently blushed. "But that was three years ago or more. Is there anything new about it?"

"Nothing really new," answered Marshfield, turning round to the speaker. "Only I again came across some of the chief actors in it but a very short time ago, and I am more than ever impressed by what indeed was my feeling from the very beginning—that in them the workings of affinity have successfully combined a stable out of two unstable compounds. It is a comfort to see one's theories so agreeably illustrated," he added, with his well-known little cackle.

Now the majority of his listeners, not chemists nor yet psychologists, were already beginning to tire of Mr. Marshfield's special

views on Pain and Pleasure, Action and Reaction, and the "equilibrium of happiness," however ingenious these might be. But we all pricked our ears at the word scandal as at the approach of a topic of more intelligibly human interest.

He had gained his point, as usual. He now proceeded to deliver his story from his own odd standpoint.

"The sensation created at the time by Archdeacon Tollmage's marital difficulty," said he, surveying his audience placidly, and dropping into that manner of speech which I knew so well and which was as of one dictating, "was, I believe, chiefly confined to ecclesiastical circles, as the journalese language has it. But, no doubt, many a society paragraphist would at the time have given more than a trifle to know the exact bearings of the case, as it was my lot to discriminate them. For it so fell out that I was present at the first act—no, by the way, it was, of course, the second—of the singularly simple drama which in the space of one hour placed the unfortunate archdeacon in such an unexpectedly painful position.

"The *dramatis personæ* were three, if we do not reckon the Confidant, which was of course myself. To my mind the most interesting, because the most active, was Cosmo Cameron

—Lord Cosmo, by courtesy, who, as you know, is the younger son of an historic family, justly celebrated in those bygone times when men who had a strong temperament did not scruple to yield to its influence.

"Now, hereditary characteristics were uncommonly developed in Lord Cosmo, and his temperament is, I am bound to state, a trifle too strong for the conventionalities of modern social life, though, of course, none the less entertaining to me on that account. I had met him once or twice at the houses of mutual friends. But it was on the coasts of Japan, on board his yacht, that we cemented our friendship, if so can be called an odd sort of attraction to each other without the smallest approach to affection on his side or trust on mine.

"What he appreciated in me were, no doubt, my unconventional views of human action. To me, his companionship became in time a never failing source of enjoyment; for he was then just the fellow to plan and carry through, with that sporting instinct and strength which I lack, all sorts of risky enterprises productive of the most precious observations to me. Besides which this descendant of a long line of exalted Highland brigands—although a pure Gael through almost all his ascendants and therefore not a representative of the strongest existing race—was and is an ideally beautiful

son of Nature's vigour, and one whom the polish of modern luxurious life has had no power to deteriorate.

"A more perfect type of manhood, at least to my mind (for I dislike your hulking pink-and-white Saxon as much as I admire his destiny), never stepped this earthly crust. As to face, he belongs, according to my classification, to the hawk genus of physiognomy; a head and forehead of classic smallness, though not, forsooth, of classic insipidity; nose clear-cut and straight, though of decidedly predatory character; eyes wide apart and wide open, in repose blue as steel, and with all the inflexible directness of steel, but black with an abnormal dilation of pupils under the slightest emotion; swarthy as to skin and hair, the latter crisply intractable in its exuberance.

"There is great expression, I hold, in teeth. His teeth drew my eyes strangely when he smiled—though his smile, I must tell you, was something delicious in its guileless candour, and many a man and woman has trusted him to their undoing on the strength of that child-smile. But his teeth! They are ferocious, carnivorous; withal small, white and close under very red, thinnish lips. As to figure, of middle height only, lean and wiry, square-shouldered, deep-chested, slender of wrist and ankle, without a blemish in his strength; a

man without nerves—save for delight or ferocity."

There was something almost pathetic in this unwonted enthusiasm on the pale mouth of Marshfield; Marshfield the large-headed, the white-faced, the spindle-shanked, and narrow-chested, who, as he himself admitted, had been driven to adopt as his consolatory motto: *A man is but what he knows.*

"Such is Cosmo Cameron, the outer animal at least," continued he after a pause of retrospective admiration. "Those who have known him in London, trim and correct in Piccadillian attire, speak of him as a 'deuced good-looking fellow.'—Ah! They should have seen him, cleaving the blue water of the tropic sea, seen him as I saw him bearing down on me through waves of death, swift, noiseless, like a shark himself!

"He used to have a long swim at sunrise, from the yacht, during our South Sea cruise, a thing that I should detest, even if I could swim. That it was he who contrived the booby-trap which sent me overboard, to have the amusement of fishing me out when I was three parts drowned, and thus to vary the monotony of his day, I never had a doubt. Be

it as it may, however, it would be difficult to imagine anything more beautiful than the sheen of his swarthy skin through the blue water over my drowning eyes; anything more superb than the masterly grip which postponed my demise. I used the word shark—that morning bath is inextricably associated with the phantom. Barely had this young Anteus lifted me spluttering and blinded, clear of the brine, on to the companion, when a gleaming shape, monstrous and indefinable, leapt up at us, nearly reaching my pendant heel. Cosmo gave a strident laugh, and with one more heave landed me sprawling on deck.

"And, as we leant over the bulwark, there indeed was the sinister black fin of a shark, shearing the surface of the water below us. My preserver—for so I must call him, I presume, after all—never admitted that he had descried the devil brute making for me from afar before plunging to the rescue. But, like the polished barbarian he was, thought the joke excellent. Half an hour later, when we had hauled the beast on board, it was fine to watch the savage glee on his face, as, with the carpenter's axe, he dealt its death blows."

Thus far, as many of us must have thought, the question of chemical affinities seemed as

remote as ever. But Marshfield always adheres to his own line of country, over which those who wish to be in at the death must be content to follow him.

"As to the moral side of this remarkable but somewhat dangerous friend of mine, at least in the everyday conventional sense, it is simpler to say there is none: he has only Instincts. His feelings for me reminded me of the anomalous affection some widely differentiated animals develop for each other—a horse for a cat, to give an instance—for, as a rule, he shewed the most absolute contempt for all natures not animally vigorous. I knew how far it could be relied upon, and would certainly not have trusted myself blindly where interests of life and death materially differed. Indeed, on one occasion I imagine it was rather a happy thought of mine to have retained possession of the last revolver. . . . This, however, would be too long a story. When we were safe again and in comparatively civilized parts once more, he was highly delighted with me and thought all the more of the weak-armed student for his Machiavelian distrust and forethought, and told me so, laughing. However, if one is to go by his actions alone, there is no controverting the fact that he was—I have reason to

think he is altered now, but that is all in accordance with my theory, as you will see—the most cynical scamp ever tolerated by Society.

"Yet, with all his contempt for the conventional tenets of modern morals—and to say, for example, that his behaviour to women was scandalous, is to state matters with the feebleness of polite language—I do not suppose there was ever a more widely popular being. He was such a man among men, did such rare fighting with his Highlanders in Africa during the short time that army discipline knew him—a born leader, a born sportsman, the breezy healthiness of his nature was simply infectious. So openly selfish, too, as to be beyond envy.

"As for the man among women. . . . The epic Don Juan of the Spanish legend comes up flabbily to the minds of those who have known my friend Cosmo!

"*Mill' e tre!* That is nothing. Numbers are nothing. 'Twas the station, the pride, the unaccountable downfall of this man's prizes, as a rule, which struck one with abstract admiration; all of which was not, of course, without consequences. That, rich as he is, he has not been ruined by repeated costs, is due to the fact that in an unregenerate world all the spouses of frail wives do not find them out; and that those who do, sometimes find it to

their better interests to put up with them; or, not having necessarily clean sheets themselves, refrain from legal appeal; or, again, are nonplussed by cross actions."

"But there is also the argument more immediately *ad hominem*," put in one who evidently did not share Marshfield's critical appreciation of his hero. "Horsewhipping and such. Is not such chastisement on record?"

"'The bastinado is a good dependence,'" quoted Marshfield calmly. "That is," he proceeded, "when the premise is secure, you know. It is apt, however, on occasion to fail in practice. There was, no doubt, something in Cosmo's eye, even more than in his depth of chest, which stood as a warning to theoretical thrashers. But on two occasions, I understand, the experiment was actually tried. On the first, the Outraged Husband was comically run out by the elbow and the nape of the neck, and dismissed with a caution: he was a little man.

"On the second, the Big Brother, dear to the novelist, called with a hunting crop (which is now in Cosmo's collection), and without loss of time fared thus: It seems that his blundering attack just grazed Cosmo on the lip; whereat Cosmo showed his teeth, closed, seized the man's arm by the wrist, and snapped it at the elbow on his knee; then escorted him home in

a fainting condition and explained courteously at the door that there had been a little accident. Still, notwithstanding this constant superiority to circumstances, England did really at one time become too hot a place for my friend. But it was more for fear of being at last brought to book and being driven into marriage, than from any sense of shame, that he saw the advisability of disappearing for a while.

"He hired a large yacht, which he made his home for the time, and on board which I eventually became his guest, when, as I said, we came across each other during my Japanese expedition.

" 'But why,' I asked of him one day, when he had expatiated at some length on one of his disgraceful episodes, as he himself mockingly dubbed them—'why put yourself to such infinite trouble in the cause, if you never find real pleasure in woman's company? You speak like an utter *blasé*, and yet you will risk not only your own life (for to juggle with that is, I know, an amusement to you) but your friend's—meaning me—which ought to be a more serious consideration, to try some fresh experiment in this seeking for

"The light that lies in woman's eyes,"

and which has certainly been your "life's undoing," as much as that of poor Tommy Moore himself.'

"I here alluded to a recent adventure of his —of ours, rather—in an Eastern port, which had well-nigh brought us both to the most disastrous of ends.

"The look he gave me in reply was anything but that of the used-up man.

" 'The risk to your precious skin, my judicious bottle-holder,' he said drily, 'put that down to your own insatiable curiosity. Concerning myself,' he continued, in a musing tone, 'I foresee that the rest of my life may still be spent in the search of an impression.'

" 'Oh, if you are still seeking for new impressions!' cried I, and added after an eloquent pause—'By this time, surely, unless you have a power of classification far beyond the conceivable, you must always be falling back into the old.'

"He again remained musing for a moment. Then his reply threw a curious side-light upon what I knew of his life.

" 'No,' he said, rather shortly, 'it is not a *new* impression I long for—it is an *old* one.' And, for the first and only time, I saw something approaching to a pathetic look on his masterful face. It was very transient.

"He had been away for three years when we returned together to England and thereupon parted.

"But during the shooting season of that same

year I fell in again with my peripatetic friend, in an unexpected and, to me, gratifying way. I was then on a visit to Archdeacon Tollmage —and this brings us round to the starting point of my tale—at his rectory of Chillingburgh.

"Archdeacon Tollmage was an old friend of my father's, and used, in consequence, to be very condescendingly kind to me.

"He was then—I hardly know what he is now—a superb epicurean, on the wrong side of fifty, with a superb belief in himself, which, considering the scholar, the polished gentleman he was, his fine taste for old wine and for artistic beauty, his talent for apt Horatian quotation, the green erectness of his person, his stature and his features, struck one as not only justified, but demanded by the fitness of things.

"He had a taste, as I have said, for things of beauty. The most beautiful appanage of the great man's household was undoubtedly his second wife. I understand that his first, to judge by the children she bequeathed him, was not so handsome; but she was an error of his youth, so to speak, and he atoned to his æsthetic principles by the choice of the second Mrs. Tollmage.

"When I was first introduced to her, I ransacked my brain to recall which demi-god of the chisel or palette could have foreshadowed such a face or form. The figure was gorgeous,

under a plain—ridiculously plain—close-fitting dress of sombre hue, and would have made the mind dwell upon antique statuary, did not the warm colouring of skin, eyes, and hair cause wandering memories of some voluptuous canvas of Titian.

"But, oddly enough, in presence of that magnificent person there was no element of attractiveness beyond a purely intellectual admiration. I do not speak of myself, who have no passion but one, and that, from its nature, cold-blooded—I mean the lust of observation; but others have confirmed my own impression. She, with her beautiful head, set in massive plaits of auburn hair, the waves of which no amount of barbarously decorous close dressing could subdue; with her deep eyes, shaded under long black lashes—eyes that should have smitten an anchorite with fire, had any soul been felt behind their glance—failed to produce aught but almost a numbing effect. Never was there such absolute coldness. Her Juno-like affability, if I may be allowed such an apparently absurd simile, was extended to all about her, without exception, in precisely the same degree; to her husband, no less nor more than to the casual visitor; to the guest under his roof-tree; to the servants; to the pale-eyed step-children, who yet seemed to hang about her skirts with uncouth adoration.

"Nevertheless, this calm, beautiful manner, however distant and uninspired it might leave strangers and friends—not to speak of her spouse—was beyond doubt precisely suited to the taste of the archdeacon. This was interesting, for it must be noted that there was nothing 'Venerable' about him but his title of courtesy, for all the silvering of his hair. Decorousness, in every element of life, in the relaxation of pleasure no less than in the performance of duty, was not only an indispensable but obviously a chief factor of his self-satisfaction.

"On the evening of the third day of my visit the archdeacon casually made an announcement which I hailed with pleasurable surprise. We were at dinner—I placed at one side of the noble old mahogany, well-laden in old-fashioned style with massive plate and rare cut glass, between the insignificant wife of the curate and my host, who grandly operated upon the turbot at one end and sent ever and anon, in the interval of condescending converse with his guests, winged words of information to his consort who sat in beauty at the other.

" 'I called at the Castle on my way back,' said he, deftly detaching the neatest of fillets as he spoke, 'and I met one of their new guests for the shooting; who, when I happened to mention your name, Marshfield,' turning

affably to me, 'said he knew you well—Lord Cosmo Cameron. Yes,' he pursued, in answer to my exclamation, 'he appeared curious to see you again, and so I asked him, if it were fine, to walk over after dinner, and have coffee with us.'

"The archdeacon and Lord Cosmo! this would be worth seeing.

"But the archdeacon was addressing his wife.

" 'This young man, my dear, I must tell you, has rather — ah — a notorious reputation. There are, I understand, not a few—what shall I say?—indiscreet episodes in his past. In fact, most people have heard of his escapades, and perhaps you had rather not make his acquaintance—in which case I shall have him shown into the study.'

"Mrs. Tollmage raised her fine brows with a slight display of astonishment.

" 'Surely,' replied she in her quiet melodious voice, 'I can have no objection to any one in whom you take an interest—a friend of Mr. Marshfield, too,' with a conventionally amiable smile at me.

" 'We spoke indeed mainly about you, Marshfield,' pursued the host, giving a quick proud look at the spouse, who invariably spoke the fitting answer. 'He talked in a most entertaining manner'—this with a private smile

which made me guess pretty shrewdly that the entertainment had been altogether at my expense.

"The ladies had retired, and we were discussing our second glass of '51 port with becoming gravity, when Lord Cosmo was announced, and burst into the subdued atmosphere like a blast of sea air. His breeziness might indeed have seemed offensive to the archdeacon and patronising to me but for the subtle indescribable charm by which this dog of a fellow carried all things before him.

"No longer the most important guest, I was now able to retire into observation; and it tickled my fancy most agreeably to perceive how the life and dash of this very loose fish seemed to infect even our magnificent host. As to the bashful, lymphatic curate, his timid soul was here brought for the first time in his life, I should say, in contact with the fascination of wickedness, and his 'facile descent' was comic in its rapidity. It culminated in an explosive cachinnation at a somewhat broad but indubitably witty innuendo which had escaped Lord Cosmo in his headlong brilliancy of utterance, and which the archdeacon, holding his third glass of port critically up to the light, perhaps to hide a twinkle of inward appreciation, had allowed to slip by unrebuked.

"But the little parson's indelicacy spoilt it all. The archdeacon arose from his chair in majesty, fixed a look of withering reprimand upon his curate (not upon the real offender, mind you), and then, laying his hand—it was the hand of a bishop, I always thought, plump, taper, white, and full of persuasion—on Cosmo's shoulder, moved an adjournment to the purifying company of the ladies.

"As we filed into the drawing-room, I must admit that there was a quite unwonted spiciness to me in the thought of watching my friend's behaviour—never having, as it happened, seen him in the presence of European ladies up to this—when it became incumbent on him to entertain two such extremes of womankind as the proud Mrs. Tollmage and her pretty, washed-out, insanely domestic companion.

"He was received with unimpeachable graciousness by the former, and with quite a flutter of affability by her companion, who no doubt, like many other estimable persons, dearly loved a lord.

"When we were duly installed—Lord Cosmo having sunk easily into a low chair, close to the Liberty draperies of Mrs. Curate (whose spouse, not yet recovered from his agony of blushes, hung miserably about the background), the archdeacon commanding us all

from the hearthrug, with the firelight throwing his symmetrical nether limbs into high relief, and I in the chimney corner, where there was just darkness enough outside the circles of pink shades to enable me to study unnoticed the faces of my actors—they were kind enough to begin the play for me.

"I was amused to mark that our hostess alone of us all seemed absolutely undisturbed by the exciting influence of Lord Cosmo's personality. Would this pique my prince of Lotharios? I wondered. He seemed, after the glance of almost startled admiration which the first sight of that rare creature never failed to draw from man or woman, to be content to devote himself to the curate's wife. But presently, as he bent his dark head over the latter's 'tatting,' he fell silent. I saw him shoot a strange, eager look at Mrs. Tollmage, and the great pupils of his eyes contracted till they became no larger than a pin's head; then they grew large and black again with startling suddenness.

"Presently, he flung himself back against the cushions of his chair and closed his eyes, to hide, I thought, heaven (or the devil) knew what now passed behind them; while Mrs. Tollmage stitched on serenely; while the archdeacon held forth in genial dissertation, the mellow port beaming from his countenance.

" 'Perhaps you can give us a day or two

before you leave these regions, my dear Lord Cosmo,' he was saying; the subject was of his cellar and Lord Cosmo's enthusiasm over the '51 vintage having been so generous a thing as to linger pleasingly in his memory. 'I should like you to taste my old *Brâne Mouton.* It was got for me at the sale of a famous Belgian cellar. They know good wine, I assure you, in that little corner of the world—and if you care to come to us, my Lord——'

"'Ah, do not tempt me, Archdeacon, cried Lord Cosmo, suddenly opening his eyes and looking up at the ponderous black form with that charming smile of his. 'I do not think it is good for me to see too much of a home like this. It makes one feel what an outcast one is, don't you know—sort of Peri out of Paradise, if I may be allowed to compare myself to a Peri. A fellow like me is destined to be a wanderer, and to my wanderings I had better betake myself again.'

"Here he sighed lugubriously. I wondered what he was making for; but the archdeacon fell guilelessly in with his humour.

"'But surely,' said he, with paternal mansuetude, 'it need depend only upon yourself to be as happy as other men, if indeed the quieter charms of home life appeal to you more now than the stronger excitements of a nomadic life? Does not Horace felicitously——'

"Lord Cosmo burked the looming quotation with a laugh and a deprecatory gesture.

" 'Woe is me! that is outside the pale of probability—the deed of my fate, in that connection, was sealed, *and lost*, many years ago. And in trying to recover it again I have brewed for myself a cauldron of trouble. It has pleased heaven to keep me and the one woman I could marry apart, up to now. Oh, I have been maddened sometimes to think how close we may have been to each other, and not known. I believe we have never even heard each other's name.'

"All eyes, even Mrs. Tollmage's, turned with different expressions of wonder towards the speaker, who, having made his singular statement with admirable simplicity, lay back in his chair once more and gazed up at the ceiling with hands locked behind his head.

" 'Oh, how romantic!' gurgled the curate's wife.

" 'Very curious,' said the archdeacon encouragingly from the chimney corner, against which he now leaned in the stately attitude which suited his figure.

"Mrs. Tollmage said nothing, but after that swift inquiring glance she prepared to listen. At least, her fingers, which had been deftly busy over some embroidery, according to her

placid habit, now rested in her lap, and she gazed abstractedly at the floor.

"'Be it what you like to term it,' said Cosmo, 'romantic, or chiefly selfish, or wholly foolish, one thing is certain—I have lived years in the haunting hope of knowing once more that soaring of the soul from earth to heaven which men call love. It was mine, for a trance-like moment—once—at the touch of a girl's hand. And no girl, or woman, I have ever met since has ever called it into being again. To that unknown my love is pledged. You see, Archdeacon,' he continued, his tones passing from soft dreaminess to their usual alertness, 'that my matrimonial prospects are remote.' Then addressing himself to Mrs. Tollmage, who sat with black lashes almost resting on her cheeks, he said sharply—

"'It would not be right, I am sure *you* will agree with me, for me to marry whilst this love for the lost unknown lives in my heart, growing stronger and stronger every year.'

"Her response was singular. She slowly raised her full lids and looked straight at him. Then, neglecting his query, said in a low imperious voice—

"'Tell the story.'

"There had come, to my thinking, an indefinable change upon her. She was immobile as ever, it is true, but it seemed, if I can use

such a simile, as the immobility of a bow at full tension.

"Cosmo's eyes gleamed, and from that moment until he ceased to speak he scarcely took them from her face.

" 'Yes,' echoed the archdeacon, with more courteous inflection, as if to remove the impression of peremptoriness which he evidently noticed, and with transient disapproval, in his wife's tones. 'Pray tell us, Lord Cosmo. An episode which has pledged a man like you to celibacy must be interesting, if it can be told,' he added prudentially; and then with a smile, *Quicquid amor jussit . . . !* yet, perhaps, after all it may be a case of conscience which can be solved.'

" ' 'Tis hardly a case of conscience,' returned Cosmo, rather shortly; and it amused me to see how his conventions and civilities were dropping from him one by one. 'It was a very simple idyll, or rather a midsummer night's dream.'

" 'How nice!' exclaimed the curate's wife, rattling her bangles.

" 'And it happened thus,' went on Cosmo, with absolute disregard of the interruption. He was seated, one arm hanging over the back of his chair, half turned to face Mrs. Tollmage, who reclined in statuesque attitude, her shapely feet crossed and resting on a stool, her eyes,

which I had never seen so large or so brilliant, fixed haughtily, as I thought, on the speaker.

"'It was in one of our Mediterranean stations, at a ball given by the Governor, the very night before the date fixed for my regiment's departure. I was not then the bearded traveller you see here, but a callow subaltern of Highlanders. The place, an old palace, was thronged, giddy with colour and music—the sort of atmosphere, you know, that drives a young fool off his head. I was pretty exhilarated with the fumes of it already, when a fellow (one of the stewards) took me up to a girl that was standing out. He did not know either of our names, evidently, so he made the mumble that is sufficient for etiquette. I did not care a jot then, anyhow; and when she looked up, rather shyly, and my eyes plunged down into the marvellous depths of hers, sea blue, there shot a kind of pang into my heart, and all sublunary matters vanished into dim space. Which of you have known love at first sight, love that is *love*, and can understand what I mean?'

"There was a curious hoarse alteration in Cosmo's voice, and he stopped as if absorbed; but after a little while he resumed his tale, and this time, in the tones of one revelling in exquisite memories:

"'We never spoke a word to each other.

She rose and yielded a bending, divinely young waist to my arm, and I carried her along through the whirl of a waltz. From that delicious head by my shoulder to my brain bewitched, passed thoughts unspoken—unspoken except in music. How I knew I cannot tell you, but I knew that as I felt she felt; that like me she was floating in a waking dream through enchantment. You know, in dreams, how free one is: pleasure is never marred by any of the interferences of waking life, duty, appearances, consequences, and such like drags! We halted at last near an open door that gave on terraced gardens, and again we looked at each other without speaking. The grounds were lit by hanging tinted lamps, and the night sky was deep blue and strewn with stars; in this darkness made visible there flitted by groups and couples. We stood face to face on the threshold, alone in our united thoughts, in the midst of the noisy throng. Little puffs of air came up to us from the flower-beds, intoxicating even as our delight. I could not speak. I could have sung like a soaring lark, but spoken words were impossible; yet in her eyes I read my own desire, and so we walked forth, her hand trembling on my arm! The fortune of love brought us quickly apart from all the rest, and there in the quaint old garden—between the

geranium hedges—do you know what a warm pungent scent they have, after the heat of the day?—there I kissed her wavy hair, the lids of her eyes, sweeter than all dim violets, and when our lips met, she yielding her soul to me as willingly as I mine to her, I, kilted subaltern, was made a god in the glory of Olympian joy! And thus I found and lost in the same hour the woman whose body and soul are by right, by the order of universal fitness, *mine:* and shall be mine yet, if ever her path crosses my own again.'

"As he said his tale a dark flush rose in Cosmo's cheek, and at the last few words there was, although he did not raise his voice—how shall I express it?—a kind of suppressed roar in it, and the veins swelled on his forehead.

"A mantle of restraint, variously diversified, had fallen on the company. The archdeacon, when I stole a glance at him, looked dubious, and, in a manner far removed from his usual complacency, was surveying his unimpeachable silken ankles. The curate's wife, shocked in all the best feelings of the British matron, was exchanging glances of dismay with her freshly-blushing husband. Mrs. Tollmage sate white and still; her eyes were cast down heavily; her straight brow slightly knitted as if under an effort of thought. As for me, I felt something of the unpleasant suspense of

one who foresees a coming explosion; but none the less did I find the situation of rare interest.

"After a short silence the archdeacon, with the instinct of the man of the world, trying to hide his annoyance at a turn of conversation so little suited to an archdeaconal drawing-room, said, with a palpable effort to appear unconcerned and to treat the indecorum as of no importance—

" 'It appears to me, Lord Cosmo, that since you were so madly bent on making this . . . ah, very exceptional young lady your wife, fate has perhaps been kind to you in keeping your paths separate. And yet, having so far aroused our curiosity, pray let me remind you that you have not yet told us how you lost her; how, with all this—ah—ardour, you never succeeded in meeting her again?'

" 'Alas,' cried Cosmo, with an exhilaration of manner much at variance with the words, 'you ask me the question I have so often and vainly asked myself! How could I have so lost her who was my second self? How could I, having grasped my happiness, have allowed it to escape me? And yet the answer is so obvious. It all happened so easily, so fatally easy! How long we kissed I cannot tell, such poignancy of bliss is not to be measured by time; but the awakening came. Some fools came crunching down our path—and, like a

startled dream, she melted away; slipped frightened from my arms, and was gone. As ill-luck would have it, it was my confounded old colonel who had borne down upon us. He kept me, bantering me upon my timid partner, like the idiot he was, for five precious minutes. When I was free I sought her like a madman—sought her in vain. The *aide* who had introduced us had cause to remember me that night—the way I pestered the fellow, but to no good!

" 'He swore by all his gods he had no notion whom he had introduced to whom; and in the end told me that I had had too much champagne, and advised me to go to bed or to the devil.

" 'No one else of my acquaintances had noticed, it seems, my slender girl-beauty. She must have belonged to some casual visitors, and next day we were steaming away towards Africa. I *had* some thoughts of deserting, but the madness just stopped short of that. When the regiment returned home, I left the service and began again my wild hunt for the unknown, but never with a glimmer of success. And so,' he added, smiling, with dancing eyes, 'no hope for me but in a freak of fate. Yet, after all, as the old saw has it, everything comes at last to him who waits.'

" 'A most extraordinary story,' quoth the archdeacon sarcastically; 'but surely you do

not mean to give us to understand that, no matter in what circumstances you find this person again, you are prepared to make her your wife. Judging from what you have told us of her—ah—hum—peculiar behaviour with you—I should be inclined to fear—hum—aha.'

"The archdeacon did not conclude his sentence, but left us to gather his inference, which was unmistakable.

" 'Oh, fie, how uncharitable!' cried Lord Cosmo, with a mocking laugh; 'why, my good Shepherd of Souls, I should think of the precept: Let him who has never sinned——'

"The archdeacon flushed and drew himself up. He was evidently deeply annoyed at being drawn into such a discussion. But neither his dignity, nor the old Adam in him, would allow him to grant this reprobate the last word.

" 'Far be it from me to condemn any one, my Lord,' he remarked, with solemn acerbity. 'I sincerely trust that this young girl may have, as years advanced, perceived the beauty of that modesty and discretion which are women's fairest adornments; and I trust also that if you do meet her, you will find her ready to turn with horror from the remembrance of her past folly and trifling—um—aha—perhaps unwilling even to renew the acquaintance with one who—ahem—has perhaps shown since a levity of

appreciation of—ah—the relative value of justice and—sin!'

"But Lord Cosmo, who had now risen and seemed to walk on air in increasing exultation, was irrepressible.

"'Nay, if you mean me,' he retorted, 'I should tell her that if I have sinned, sinned repeatedly, sinned to perdition, it was through the loss of her; that in all my madness she never was once out of my mind and heart—not once; that such a life as I have led has but taught me all the more, if such a thing were possible, that there is only one woman in the world for me, and that woman, she. And when I meet her again, I shall say: Come. And she will come. She will come to me from her mother's side, from out of convent walls, from husband or from children. Aye, she will come, for she is *mine*. And were she in heaven she would come to me in hell.'

"The bomb was cast. Impossible to describe the awfulness of the silence which followed these awful words.

> "'Bei ihm, bei ihm ist Seligkeit
> Und ohne Cosmo Hölle,'

murmured I idiotically, in the vain hope of giving a lighter direction to the terrible seriousness of my friend's misdeed; but neither he, nor any one else, had a thought to spare to such insignificance as myself.

"Cosmo had halted opposite Mrs. Tollmage, and when he ceased speaking their eyes met; I saw the look that passed between them, and I would fain describe it to you—it was a flame. You fellows," said Marshfield, turning to the novelist and to us generally—"you have so twisted and tortured our wholesome English tongue out of all exactness in your struggles after the novel and the realistic, that if one wants to convey a strong impression nowadays, one is, willy-nilly, driven into hyperbole. That interchange of glances between those two made me feel as if it would have scorched me, had I come between.

"Then I saw the tension of her whole beautiful body relax. A tide of colour swept over her face and her lips parted. After a second she rose; as did immediately every one else in the room.

"The archdeacon, outraged in his most sacred susceptibilities, was speechless; principally, I should say, from a sense of the inadequacy of all decorous language to such an emergency. In the pause the curate and his wife took their leave, conveying in their *adieux* to their hosts much melancholy sympathy, and in their bows to Cosmo and myself a Christian abhorrence.

"Mrs. Tollmage took two or three steps with them towards the door, and there stood, half

turned away from us, her proud head a little bent, as if listening.

"Cosmo next came forward.

" 'It is time to depart,' he said quietly, *dans le vague;* and composed, airy, deliciously unconscious of offence, walked up to his swelling host on the hearthrug.

" 'Is there not an up-train which stops at Chillinburgh about this time, and can you tell me exactly when it is due?'

" 'Ten thirty-five,' said the archdeacon, too pleased at the prospect of getting rid of his troublesome guest to note the oddness of the query from one who had taken up his abode in the neighbourhood, for the time, at least. (But I noted it.)

"Cosmo took out his watch. 'There are just a few minutes to spare,' he said emphatically.

"Mrs. Tollmage here moved out of the room and closed the door behind her.

" 'Well, good-night, Archdeacon,' went on Cosmo, smiling pleasantly; 'I hope I have not scandalised you.'

" 'I shall not speak about myself,' said the divine, with much dignity, 'but I fear you have strongly displeased Mrs. Tollmage,' looking round significantly at her empty place. 'She has not been accustomed to such talk in her drawing-room.'

" 'I should be sorry to think I had offended

her,' returned the culprit, suavely. 'I hope I may soon have occasion to efface all bad impressions.' And, with consummate assurance, he shook the archdeacon warmly by the hand, and nodding familiarly to me, left us.

"For a moment the archdeacon, surprised almost into rigidness by such unwonted treatment, stood lost in reflection, then, turning somewhat ruefully to me—

" 'I am afraid, Marshfield,' he said, 'that your friend is a little mad.'

" 'Perhaps,' said I; yet could not help adding, for I felt that the bomb was yet to burst, 'but I must say there seems to be much method in his madness.'

"Whereupon, whether impelled by the desire of beholding so dangerous a person safely off the premises, or by his duties as host, or yet by curiosity, the archdeacon proceeded with stately gait to the hall to see the last of Lord Cosmo Cameron.

"We found him just encased in his fur-lined coat, standing apart from the servants, and I thought that his face now looked pale. But, even as we appeared, there came a swift rustle of silk upon the stairs, and he threw back his head with a gesture of exultant triumph.

"It was Mrs. Tollmage, who hurried forward, enveloped in a long crimson cloak, the hood of which she was drawing over her head as

she came. I could see her little black satin slippers gleam in and out under a froth of lace.

"'Why, Olivia!' ejaculated the archdeacon. She never even turned her head; but, slackening the rapidity of her steps, continued to walk towards the open hall door with her usual stately demeanour.

"Through the still night air came the distant roar and shriek of the approaching up-train. Lord Cosmo glanced over his shoulder at us and smiled: it was the smile of a Lucifer who had reconquered Heaven by his wiles. Then he made a low bow and offered his arm to the archdeacon's wife; and together they passed out between the model footman, who strained a rolling eye after them, and the dignified butler, second in majesty only to his master.

"The archdeacon made a sudden movement, but meeting his butler's impassable glance, arrested himself.

"'Marshfield,' said he with a strong effort at pretending unconcern, but with a strangled voice, 'shall we take a turn too? The night is fine.'

"There was some slight delay: while the footman darted for overcoats and the butler presented hats, I stood with every sense keenly on the alert. I heard the swing-gate at

the end of the garden fall to with rhythmic thuds.

"It was a beautiful night; but that half-hour's walk under the dim starlight along the gravel paths of the rectory gardens, listening to the miserable platitudes by which the unfortunate man endeavoured to baffle the horrible anxiety growing upon him, though all the time he was straining his ears to catch the sound of those footsteps which were never to return, and nursing the vials of his wrath for that curtain lecture which was never to be delivered, was one of the most uncomfortable experiences of my life.

"And then, when the pretence of waiting could be no longer kept up, there was still a little interlude when the deserted husband, clutching at the last shreds of his self-respect, prated of his apprehension of accidents and sudden sickness; upon which we started to make inquiries, beginning, by tacit understanding, at the station.

"And there, at last, the bomb burst. Of course I knew from the beginning what had happened, and I must confess that, much as I liked Cosmo—and even sympathised with him to a certain extent (that is, in the abstract), even here—that my thoughts turned many a

time that dreary night with something like revolt to the picture I could conceive of the unalloyed raptures of the reunited couple, while they steamed away unconcerned, as in a dream, of all consequences, leaving ruin and misery behind them.

"He had said: 'Come,' and she had gone. And the poor archdeacon had to bear his humiliation and dishonour with as good fortitude as he could muster.

"This is the whole story in a nutshell.

"However," said Marshfield, in conclusion, "this abduction under the very eyes of the husband was not really the most curious point of the case. It might perhaps rank only as one of Lord Cosmo's variegated amatory ventures, but for the fact that it has been the last of the long series."

"Indeed!" said our reverend antiquary, no doubt hoping to hear at length a tale of retribution. "Has their sin been brought home to them, then?"

"Brought home to the innocent, deserted archdeacon. But not to Cosmo, nor to his mistress—mistress still, *faute de mieux*, for the abandoned husband has taken, whether intentionally or not, the only revenge in his power: he never sought a divorce, his reading of the Scriptures, he said, not admitting of such a remedy.

"That is the only drop of bitterness in

Cosmo's cup; curiously enough, she seems to care little or nothing about the matter.

"But Cosmo, as he told me, characteristically, feels himself capable of coming back to England and strangling the archdeacon if the latter has not soon the tact to retire from existence, and so allow the legitimation of the young Camerons present and to come. Otherwise a more perfect life-harmony I have never seen. I have the pleasantest recollection of my recent visit to them in Paris.

"I confess that what I witnessed there astonished me not a little, until I had applied my little theory to the case. The change was integral. Cosmo the volatile, Cosmo the selfish, the irrepressible, with whose adventures—even the comparatively few I happen to know—I could fill several novelist's note-books, had all his passion, energy, all his life's desires, his pride, his every moment's thought centred upon his mate; she, the cold, the impassible, the haughty Mrs. Tollmage, after more than three years of this interloping union, showed without a thought of reserve all the ardour of a newly-won mistress, looked years younger, and wore on a face more beautiful than ever the nearest approach to the *serenity of happiness* I have ever seen. If anything happens to either of that couple before the taming of old age, I am positive the other will not exist alone.

"But to return to my original strain of similes. Here," said Marshfield, "is a pretty example of the universal working of the principle of affinity: a free molecule possessed of high potential energy ready to 'run down,' as the jargon has it, roams in highly unstable condition in the chaos of unsettledness, that is with its destiny unfulfilled, until it comes in contact with a certain other molecule, antithetically situated; whether free and unstable like itself, or attached to another of lesser affinity, it matters not. The meeting takes place, and behold the sudden action, inevitable, irresistible, and above all the absolute change in the two agents' innermost nature after the disruption of the weaker compound and the expulsion of the less attractive element.

"I do not know," concluded Marshfield, rising at last and, with his little cackle, pulling the creases out of his coat after the long sitting, "whether I make myself understood, but I assure you that it is a description, in words of broad theory, of the Tollmage affair."

THE GUESTS of the WOLFMASTER

The Guests of the Wolfmaster

"Such a bout as we have just seen," said I to Marshfield, as we emerged from the Fencing Club one day, "is all very well, most brilliant and all that—but it is absolutely inconceivable at sharps."

"Ah!" said Marshfield enigmatically.

I noticed that he looked as though he could a tale unfold. I knew then that he had sought me that afternoon in my most likely haunt to pour into my willing ear one of his latest stories.

"You recollect," he went on presently, in his usual complacent, measured manner—"you recollect Cosmo Cameron—I mean you remember my speaking of him?"

The sound of the name whipped up my attention at once. I had never met the man, but had none the less learned to take a vivid interest in his singular personality. Rapidly, while Marshfield paused, evidently for the purpose of allowing me to do so, I recalled the salient points of what Marshfield had told me of this man's career. . . . So, the wild Cameron was again to the fore, and in a duel! It then

flashed upon me that, as previously described by Marshfield, he was none of your academic swordsmen, and the vision of that masterly, deliberate, terrible thrust which had concluded the encounter we had just witnessed on the floor of the Fencing Club rose vividly before my mind's eye.

"The deuce!" said I, with a definite pang of regret and disappointment. "Is that the end of it all?" And then, moralising: "Jealousy, I suppose. It could not go on for ever. Jealousy—on his side, of course."

But, as I looked for confirmation, Marshfield was still smiling his thin smile quite inscrutably.

"Jealousy?" he replied; "not exactly. At least, not the sort of jealousy any one has heard of for some centuries. It was curious enough, the whole story—motive, execution, and finale."

The utter absence of concern upon the speaker's face struck me with surprise. Cold-blooded creature! Why, the man had been his friend for years! But Marshfield, as I have already said, has his own way of telling his tales; and so I listened, as we continued our western trend beneath the skeleton trees of the Parks.

"You are probably aware," said he, starting upon his narrative with measured delivery and

chosen epithets, as one lecturing from his notes, "that the wolf, an extinct animal in England, is still to be found on the Continent. To this day there exists in France an office which savours quaintly of the old world, that of wolfmaster, or *Lieutenant de Louveterie*, whose work it is to assist in carrying out annually the destruction of as many wolves as possible.

"When I was lately in Paris, the guest of that incomparable couple, Lord Cosmo Cameron and his wife—now regularly so, for the Venerable, the Archdeacon, my good old friend, had fallen victim to the influenza a year ago—they received an invitation to spend a week at the château of a certain M. de Sourdes, who, holding an appointment such as I have described, was hospitably inclined to extend its rare privilege to a select few in wolfing-time. Cosmo, eager to accept but bound to me, asked and obtained permission for me to accompany them, though, truth to say, I am hardly the type of individual the wolfmaster generally invited on such occasions.

"The château of La Motte-Herbault is one of those eighteenth-century French country mansions, all for luxury and comfort, and with nothing left of mediæval sternness about it, for all that it was built upon the foundation of an antique stronghold, as its name implies. It

stands well in the Sologne district—good sporting country, as you know—midway between Berry and Touraine. I like," said Marshfield, with a little pedantic nod, "to speak of France in terms of the old provinces: it means so much more, historically, than their new-fangled departments. A very perfect house, with pointed roofs of slate and much curvetting ironwork. The main body, originally a hunting-box of the first Bourbon king, broad and stately, with double marble stairs leading in Renaissance style to the great door, is flanked at right angles by two pavilions of later "Rococo" times, which must have witnessed, in their pristine days of powder and patch and general dissoluteness, a number of tender adventures and *souper fins*. These buildings, in conjunction with a noble iron gate, inclose what the architects of such places term the *cour d'honneur*. The winter from which we are barely emerging has been, you may conceive, propitious to the seekers of wolf-premiums; and M. de Sourdes, as lieutenant of the district, had had more opportunities to carry out the duties of his office than, as he told me, for the last ten years. It is not, however, of the mysteries of *Louveterie* that I would entertain you now, but rather of Cosmo, and I will leave our adventures with hound and gun out of sight.

"Cosmo, who, *in loco*, shows himself quite continental, gave me what he called '*la carte du pays, mon cher.*' But, save our host, the Camerons themselves, one beauteous Madame Andreassy (of whom more anon) and the fine man that she held as her cavalier, my fellow-guests, good specimens of the fashionable French male and female, ready of speech, excellent of manners, and loose of morals, most of them, had no special interest for me.

"Vicomte de Sourdes (a descendant, by the way, of the fourth Henry of France, from the wrong side, of course), the owner, not only of the château and its demesne, but also of enormous tracts in the wild Sologne, is a thorough sportsman, a type rarer in France than among us, but nevertheless to be found occasionally, for all our traditional jokes; a hard rider, a first-class whip and shot, with that intense and intelligent appreciation for things English that seems not only the mark of every true sportsman, but, in these days of systematic democratisation over yonder, the acme of *bon ton* among the exclusive set. A middle-aged widower who, having suitably married off all his daughters, has resumed the demeanour of the *Vert-Galant*, that forebear he is so proud of and whom he undoubtedly recalls to the mind; merry-eyed, deep-chested, with ringing laugh and conquering upturned

grey moustache; drinking his three bottles of Burgundy, and loving the company of pretty women in his house as much (though not more) as that of men that are men. '*Des hommes, jarnidieu . . . pas des mannequins, palsambleu!*' as he says (for he has adopted a selection of expletives suited to his ancestry and appearance). Fellows who can paddle the half-frozen marshes with eye and hand on the alert, who can do justice to his piqueurs' sagacity in the boar-hunt, follow him up steeps and across torrents that would make an M. F. H. stare; fellows, besides, who can come in the evening to the choice dinner and his old Volnay, and turn a wide-awake eye, *jarnicoton!* upon the new toilettes, and a gallant ear to the conversation of his fairer guests. I think it was distinctly understood in the world that none but fair faces on the one hand, and thorough paced good and stout fellows on the other, were ever entertained by the Vicomte at La Motte-Herbault; and invitations were appreciated accordingly. How I came to be there," commented Marshfield, "was owing to the fact that M. de Sourdes had nothing to refuse Cosmo.

"Of course, the long tale of the latter's adventures, amorous and otherwise, was well known to the set in which our Vicomte lived; his unbreakable vigour of health and strength, and the magnificence of his wife's beauty, were

equally eloquent qualifications for the freedom of La Motte-Herbault.

"The house, as I have said, was full. And if in one way it was a perfect Walhalla for lovers of sport, it was also in another a veritable Abbey of Thelema for the lovers of those easy, ephemeral and transparent plots of gallantry which are the very salt of life in an idle society. Delightfully appointed, full of tempting and luxurious nooks, it formed so handy a shelter for the carrying on of amorous intrigue, more or less openly conducted under the smiling and knowing eyes of the jolly Vicomte, and the spectacles of his eminently respectable, but eminently dense, sister, that it is difficult to conceive its perfection in that direction otherwise than as the result of system. Be this as it may, the only two unpardonable crimes at La Motte-Herbault were: not to be amusing or not to know how to amuse oneself.

"Cosmo and his wife—it is impossible now to reckon one without the other—came, however, perilously close to the first offence. But *he* redeemed the situation, as you will see, with his usual brilliancy."

Marshfield paused a moment, his eyes absently lost in the copper mist hanging over distant Kensington.

"That I am," he pursued, taking up the interrupted thread of his story and his stroll in the same leisurely fashion, "of the cold-blooded order of vertebrates, is, I believe, the figurative (and, as usual, untechnical) way my friends have of describing me. I am incapable of creating the warmth requisite for enthusiasm. Yet my interest in the Camerons began to run curiously near such weakness. In my eyes Cosmo has always been the most splendid type of the natural man. A civilised being, if you will, artistic too, and cultivated in a certain odd way, but one in whom civilised polish has deadened nothing of man's native savagery. These characteristics were remarkable enough in his "dishevelled youth-time" (as the French have it), but their workings after he had, as any Viking or Northman of old might have done, snatched and carried off the woman he wanted, were immeasurably more wonderful.

"I can only think of the superb mating of the lion in the midst of minor weaker life of the world, terrible yet admirable, all sufficient and serenely scornful of aught beyond the *égoïsme à deux*. Byron has a rhyme somewhere, I believe, anent his yearning that the whole of beautiful womankind had but one mouth, that he might kiss it. Now, my Cosmo had found what was to him the living realisation of all feminine glory and delight in

this willing captive of his bow and spear. In fact, the love of the whilom Don Juan seemed, after these years, to grow more and more exalted.

"To watch this man and this woman in the midst of the most artificial, the most subtly corrupt society imaginable, to see them remain as wholly, selfishly, single-mindedly centred in each other as the first pair themselves might have been in the Garden of Eden, was, you will admit, to one whose passion is to observe, above all to observe human nature, a spectacle as interesting as it was rare. Conceive, if you can . . . but no, you could not conceive the delicate delight of the moral anatomist with such phenomena under his scalpel!

"Our host, however, I fancy, had hardly reckoned upon such a state of things when he had asked the couple down as his guests of honour. '*C'est du délire, positivement*,' he said to me, the first evening, 'this passion of your friend for his spouse! There is only one case like it on record, that of my ancestor, the great Henri, for my ancestress, the beautiful d'Estrée . . . and that, you know, had at least the excuse of irregularity. It is, perhaps, not so amusing for us others as if it was . . . well, the other way, but, *sangrebleu*, I understand it —yes, I understand it. *Peste!* what a superb woman, your friend's wife!'

"As for me, I have seldom passed a more agreeable time than those three days of the great snowstorm. It was a terrific blizzard, and there was no question of man, far less of horse, venturing into the country. In consequence, the whole society was thrown upon its own resources for enjoyment indoors. At first, no doubt, the whole feminine camp, and perhaps some of the men, too, welcomed the situation.

"But in the circumstances you can imagine what sort of a forcing house La Motte-Herbault became for the development of what in that society is euphemistically called *flirtage*. In a very short time, the wholesome equilibrium between the business of sport and the relaxation of ladies' society being destroyed, a loaded atmosphere of storm began to be felt within as well as without. Our host, I think, foresaw it. (Perhaps he had had some previous experience of the kind!) He spent most of the ample spare time between meals, prolonged as festively as possible, in anxiously tapping the weather-glass, in vainly scanning the thick falling flakes for a peep of sky, or in useless consultation with sundry brick-coloured, odd-faced *piqueurs*.

"The ladies, who up to now had been all sweetness with each other and with their admitted swains, began to discover elements of disturbance in the new joy of having the latter

in attendance from morning till night—too severe a test at the best of times. Lovers' quarrels ensued, and raids (whether in perverse initiative or for mere reprisals) into camps hitherto respected; acerbity in some cases, exchange of hostages in others.

"Towards the third day relations in this small, very earthly, paradise became exceedingly strained indeed, and natural observation from a perfectly neutral standpoint correspondingly amusing. On the evening of the fourth the storm suddenly abated outside; but it broke out indoors; produced, in fact, the strong diversion required to clear the atmosphere of latent discontent.

"For some time Madame Andreassy, of the whole company, had, under my watchful eye, exhibited the most obvious signs of exasperation. Of this lady I have promised further details. Hers was an interesting personality, one that at any time would have well repaid special study. A Levantine Greek, married to some immensely rich financier of her own nationality, who did not accompany her to La Motte-Herbault, she was (barring Lady Cosmo) far and away the most beautiful woman of the party, in her own limber, luxurious, Oriental way. And it did not need the pantomime of my genial host's countenance and gesture when referring to her to make me form a

pretty shrewd conjecture as to what particular class of feminine temperament she belonged. I heard she had known Cosmo in days gone by. —That Cosmo! it would seem as if there had never been a notoriously pretty woman in the world he had not known. Before I had observed her in his company for the space of three minutes, I drew clear conclusions as to the nature of her previous acquaintance with my handsome friend, and to her readiness to renew it on the same footing, all present little impediments notwithstanding.

"She had nevertheless a very fine swain of her own—a man in a thousand, certainly, in the eyes of a woman of her nature. By the way, you may have heard of him; he is a celebrated frequenter of the salles d'armes, and has had as many duels as Bussy d'Amboise—the Chevalier de Navarrenx."

"Manuel de Navarrenx, do you mean?" I exclaimed. The name brought back at once to my mind the starting point of my friend's tale. "Why, of course. I have crossed a courteous blade with him myself at the Mirlitons in Paris. He is "one of the first four." A handsome fellow. A little too theatrical perhaps, but it suits him uncommonly. To see him, in his black velvet, fall on guard with his

die-away airs and his white, melancholy face, so odd in its contrast to that fierce, up-turned moustache that stabs the moon—well, it is worth seeing! He looks as if he had just stepped out of a Velasquez canvas. Then to feel the masterly touch of his blade, revealing in a second the whole affectation of his seeming languor . . . ! Yet he makes it go down."

"That is the very man," continued Marshfield. "Well, despite the fact that, as I said, he was her special servant (a recent conquest too, evidently, for I thought to detect a certain ardour under the languorous mien you have described), the little lady was nevertheless quite ready to throw him overboard for Cosmo. That was apparent to me the very first time I laid eyes upon them together.

"I was in the great white and gold salon early and watched the guests file in. Madame Andreassy arrived, with calculated effect, just one moment after the dinner announcement: I think she flattered herself she was the last and certainly the most noticeable of the assembly. But she had reckoned without the Cosmos; for, even as she swung herself into the room, clad in the most daring of the late lamented Worth's creations, and was revelling in the

little stir her appearance created, the English couple halted side by side on the threshold of another door opposite, and all eyes turned with a sort of amazed admiration upon them.

"I hardly ever realised so strongly before how much our own race, at its best, surpasses all others than at the moment when I saw the magnificent pair advance upon us in the midst of all that was vigorous among men and fair among women in France.

"Cosmo looked to me as distinctly beautiful as might an antique god (if we can imagine an antique god swarthy and aquiline) who had stepped down from his heathen paradise among the common herd of men; his wife, in her trailing dress of white velvet, large and sumptuous, yet simple, as superior to all women present in herself as was the noble cut and hang of her robes to their elaborate toilets. Cosmo, as he told me later, insisted upon a yearly dress-buying pilgrimage to Vienna, the only place on this planet, according to his wide and special knowledge of such matters, where justice could be done to a splendour of that standard.

"The general movement which greeted their entrance was almost equivalent to an outcry, and, unobserved, I noticed the extraordinary series of changes which passed over Madame Andreassy's face. If ever a devil looked out of a woman's eyes, he looked out of the fair

Levantine's as she shot a glance from her former admirer to his wife and back again.

"Presently Cosmo, perfect in affable suavity, was assigned to convey her in to dinner; the host, I fancy, must have had a little delicate hint from the Andreassy woman to that effect. I have given you to understand that M. de Sourdes had a genial sympathy with most *péchés mignons*, above all, as he told me, with one of his great laughs, when committed by *pécheresses mignonnes*. After the first shock, caused by the Englishwoman's appearance, Madame Andreassy had recovered all her native confidence. She knew—none better—the power of her own audacious charm. Moreover, it could never enter into her conception of ethics that it were possible to prefer the fruits of one's own lawful preserves, be they never so luscious, to those that could be rifled from a neighbour's ground.

"I sat opposite. The lady to whom I was entrusted having, in a very short time, openly showed that she did not consider me game worthy of her shot, I was able, over an exquisite fare, to devote all my attention to them. Madame Andreassy spoke English—a language unfamiliar at our end of the table, therefore more private; and though she must have seen that I was listening, and been well aware that she was revealing little secrets, she did not seem to care—probably for the same

reason that all through life has induced people of that kind to treat me as of no account. It is not flattering, but it is convenient.

"She was delightful to watch, laying her snares as deftly, as eagerly, as restlessly as a spider; with the same seeming purposelessness covering the same exactness of design. And yet Cosmo, as he looked down at the beauty that displayed itself by his side, ripe as a peach, and as tempting, had nought but perfunctory glances of civility. At first she was demure and simple—airs that contrasted piquantly with the depth of knowledge in her brown eyes, where the devil that was enthroned was now of the most alluring kind. But, presently, she realised the necessity of more vigorous attack.

" '*Mon Dieu!* how strange they should meet again—she who had thought they never would —never! Did he remember how many years ago?—the yacht, the dear yacht!'

"Cosmo bowed with an air that might pass for one of delicate discretion—that discretion which is as salt to the other savours of a romantic understanding. But his eyes wandered rather listlessly from his neighbour down the long row of faces till they caught Lady Cosmo's gaze, and then they brightened with that wonderful flame I had first seen in them the day he had recognised his lost love in the poor Archdeacon's drawing-room.

"Then, as if refreshed and satisfied, he turned suddenly a polite but extinguished glance upon Madame Andreassy, and she, with a mock-modest eyelid upon her cheek, proceeded upon her reminiscences.

" 'That night at Smyrna, when the moon rose, and she and her poor father—*pauvre papa, il est mort, vous savez*—had supped with Lord Cosmo; and—did he remember?—poor papa had fallen so fast asleep; Lord Cosmo had sat near her on deck, and he had said things—oh, but things!'

"She laughed, but her laugh was, designedly or not, a little tremulous.

" 'Eh? If she *had* listened to him that night when he wanted to give the order to let the white wings of the dear yacht to the wind, if they had sailed together away——'

"She paused, and Cosmo, with a light laugh, cried, in his airy French—

" '*Tiens*, and did I offer to run away with papa, too?'

" '*Oh, non—je me trompe*,' said the Levantine with a sudden daring look, and sinking her voice as she relapsed once more into English; 'that night papa was not of the company.'

" '*Mon Dieu, Madame*,' said he, with a shrug of his shoulders, 'moonlight or starlight, at Smyrna or in Japan, those nights on the

yacht were all so like each other that—*ma foi . . .*'

"The rebuke was radical. It required all the masterfulness of a Cosmo to dare such a one.

"Madame Andreassy grew a little pale. I saw the diamonds on her bosom scintillate under the quickened pulse of her heart. After a scarcely perceptible pause, however, she said, with admirable composure—

"'I see. All the past is to be forgotten, then. So much the better; what is past is finished, and what is finished is stupid. We must then remake acquaintance, Milord. It is the present that is the good time.'

"'Ah, the present,' repeated Cosmo, his eyes playing truant again; 'yes, the present is good, as you say, Madame.'

"Madame Andreassy followed his eyes, and, with a sudden petulant movement, rolled her bread between her fingers as if she would have kneaded a little cake of poison.

"Meanwhile, her own particular cavalier ate his dinner, quite undisturbed, between the smiles of two *minois chiffonés*, one of which belonged to the neglectful dame allotted to me. There was no jealous quiver on his conquering moustache, no anxious roll of his fatal eye. In fact, if truth be told, he stared a good deal himself at Lady Cosmo, who was well within his

range of vision. He was an experienced Thelemite.

"'How changed he is, your Cosmo!' said the little lady to me suddenly, after dinner that night, and with an angry look, as if she held me in some way responsible. 'I knew him long ago, but it's not the same man. Say, then, what has happened to him? He used to be so gay, so full of talk!' Then, as if struck with fresh indignation, '*C'est qu'il est abruti, ce pauvre Cosmo!* It is that terribly large Englishwoman, that statue in low dress! Ah, what a marriage! And *à propos*,' dropping her voice, 'is it a marriage, *en parenthèse?* You can tell. One hears funny things. Our good hostess is all propriety, of course, and she would hardly ask us to meet a *faux ménage* if she knew.'

"And Madame Andreassy modestly rearranged a camellia in the deep valley of her bosom, casting down her eyes with a sudden assumption of particularity that was quite charming. 'It would be a little strong, *hein?*'

"'Oh, reassure yourself,' I said. 'Lady Cosmo is Lady Cosmo Cameron as fully as law or church can make her.'

"'*Tant mieux*,' said Madame tartly, closing her fan with a snap; 'and since how long?'

"'Madame,' said I, 'I believe the eldest child is nearly three years old.'

"She gave me a quick look, smiled a curious little smile, nodded her head, and then turned to welcome the approach of those moustaches which—such was the infection of the easy immorality of our surroundings—I had already come, myself, to consider as lawfully her own property.

"Ignoring her first repulse, the dauntless dame began her attack afresh the next day. I almost admired her perseverance, her unshakable belief in her own power and in the frailty of masculine resolution, in the face of the rebuffs which, though now with the most perfect breeding in the world, Cosmo continued to administer. She left no wile untried, down to extravagant eulogies of Lady Cosmo's beauty and effusive civility to the latter (who, by the way, received it after the stony fashion that I defy any one but an Englishwoman to adopt in perfection). The next move was an affected coldness, a blasting scorn and indifference, and a melting show of favour towards her own chevalier. This last note, in her endeavour, no doubt, to awaken some answering chord in Cosmo's system, she pitched somewhat too high even for her sympathetic surroundings; but the beau Navarrenx, for all his *blasé* air, seemed to turn the tune to pleasant account for himself.

"These undercurrents, so long as the busy

life, which kept the men out of doors during the best part of the day, lasted, did not make much difference in the social intercourse at La Motte-Herbault. But during the great imprisonment, when the general harmony began, as I have informed you, to be seriously disturbed, the married lovers became the butt for either the mockery or the ill-humour of the company.

"Now the men, as a rule, would have been content to accept them just as they were; in fact, it pleased me to note the unconscious respect which marked their intercourse with the English beauty. But, to the ladies—even to those who did not regard the pair with vindictiveness—the pair were a bore and a restraint, and I am not prepared to say that in the end their host did not find them so too. Madame Andreassy's bitter tongue had a ceaseless gibe at their intention, be they absent or present. 'Milady Eve has gone to bed,' I heard her inform Navarrenx one evening in the smoking-room, as he squatted at her little feet, smoking with ecstatically upturned eyes each half-finished cigarette as she handed it to him. 'You saw her leave just now in the middle of *cette chère* Nasha's pretty Spanish song —"*Besito.*" Milord Adam went after her to light the candles. Through the door I saw them; I saw him plant a great kiss there, on

the nape of her neck. It is becoming quite indecent,' said the Levantine, viciously twisting (as no one was within sight but myself) a lock of the chevalier's black hair.

"Next day—the last—Lady Cosmo pleaded a headache, and would not come down at all. In the evening, as I issued from my room at dinner-time, I collided with Cosmo, who was emerging from his wife's apartment: we were both located in the same corridor in a side wing overlooking the garden. He was marching along very absently, a smile and the note of a song on his lip; his cheek was flushed. He stepped back from contact with me, and seemed to fall awake from some glorious dream.

" 'My God, Marshfield,' he said in an altered voice—'my God, how I do love that woman . . . !'

"The repast that night, perhaps by reason of Lady Cosmo's absence, was the most exuberantly mirthful I had yet known even in that jovial house. Even before the circulation of the champagne (which, in the usual French style, appeared late, just before dessert) the gaiety of the party was great; then it became boisterous, and the talk, at all times free round that table, such as fully justified Lady Cosmo's retirement.

"M. de Sourdes was in high spirits at the

announced prospect of a break in the weather, and, like a mettled steed confined overlong to stables on high diet, in a rare state of physical exuberance. His great laugh rang out and made the glasses tingle. Cosmo, however, was in a dangerous mood. Those that knew him less well might have accused him of having what the French call *une pointe de vin;* but, whatever the cause of the secret intoxication that fired his eye, he alone of the noisy company—excepting of course myself—was that night sober in the accepted sense when dessert came round.

"As for Madame Andreassy, if I suspected her of entertaining divers minor devils before, I can vouch she seemed possessed of Lucifer himself then—and infernally pretty she looked, too. Some of her attentions, these languorous and mysterious, she bestowed upon the cavalier at her side, whose pale face seemed almost deathlike in contrast with the somewhat heated countenances around, but whose long and white fingers made as good play with cup and beaker as the best of them. But Cosmo, opposite to her, was as usual her butt, the mark for her shrillest gibes, her most daring mockery. He met them with imperturbable, if insolent, good humour, underlying which I felt—how shall I describe it?—a sort of deadly purpose, ready to spring, yet biding its time.

"The servants withdrew; the ladies lingered; the Vicomte, his handsome face ominously crimsoned, passed the wine and called for healths.

" '*Ah ça!* A little more energy, you there! Madame, a glass of wine to the most beautiful eyes in the world! Milord, empty me that glass a little quicker than that. *Mon Colonel*, just you fill Milord's glass, please; we are going to drink to *ces dames.*'

" 'Pardon,' said Cosmo, lying negligently back in his chair, as all the men rose with a half-tipsy shout of approval. '*Pardon*, you will excuse me: a matter of principle, my dear host. I have drunk enough to *ces dames* in my life. At present and for the future I drink only to my wife.'

"The slight emphasis on the words *ces dames* could, by any one disposed to see it in an implied meaning, be taken as a piece of supreme impertinence. Everybody paused, some with glasses arrested midway to their lips, some amused, some curious, some inclined to be angry—Madame Andreassy, her small head craned forward, her eyes fixed as you may see a lovely little viper poised for the dart.

" 'I drink,' said Cosmo, who now rose to his feet and swung slowly a brimming glass with a kind of suppressed fierceness, 'I drink to My Lady.'

"He drained it to the last drop, set it down, and sent his eyes round the tables—steel blue, with contracted pupils, challenging.

"'*Voilà qui est fort*,' said the Levantine, at last breaking the silence. 'Lady Cosmo must be proud, my faith, to have such a paladin for her knight! Yet, in these days can be gallant that way who will.' She went on speaking with loud intent to Navarrenx, and shrugging her audacious shoulders: 'An Englishman, above all: it can cost him nothing but the trouble to say the words. It is not the fashion now with Englishmen to consider their words worth maintaining. . . . Now, in olden days a man who would exalt his wife at the expense of other women—ah, then it was more serious! He would have thought twice about it. . . .'

"There was an indescribable uproar upon this, the spell of surprise at Cosmo's curious behaviour being broken: high notes of feminine protest, the loud laughter of a few men, the mock anger of others, and the loud voice of M. de Sourdes from the end of the table, accompanied by thumps of his great fist.

"'*Jarnidieu!* I do not exactly say I am with you, my good Cosmo. I have too much of the temper of my great ancestor for that, *ventre saint-gris!* But I can admire you for it, and by my soul, I do—,*eh, Mesdames*, do not

tear my eyes out—ha, ha, ha! One may admire without imitating, *jarnicoton!* I have a large heart and the devil——'

"In the midst of this hubbub Navarrenx slowly subsided into his seat and fell to dissecting a slice of pineapple upon his plate, with heavy lids cast down and the greatest nicety possible. Madame Andreassy shot a sidelong look at him, and her nostrils quivered. Cosmo still of the whole company remained standing, waiting as if eager to speak, but unwilling that his words should be lost; and Madame called attention to his attitude with a small, vindictive, pointed forefinger.

" 'Silence, if you please, *Messieurs et Mesdames!* Let the model husband speak once more—if it is not very amusing, it may be instructive for us poor people—Well, Milord of the fine phrases?'

" 'Madame,' said Cosmo, his countenance lit by an extraordinary joyousness, 'you spoke of olden days—the fine olden days when a knight could maintain his lady's supremacy at the point of his lance. They were good times, you think . . . so do I. A man could then show what his love meant, to the shedding of his blood . . . . or, better still, the blood of others. Ladies could judge of the value of their lover's devotion. But are we now really so degenerate in this house of the great Vert-Galant's son

as you seem to think?—I cannot believe it. We cannot, it is true, tilt with lance and mace; but cannot we wield the sword? . . . I say that I drink to My Lady as the fairest and first of women. I am ready to uphold my word, and, gentlemen, I challenge you to drink the toast! Are there no cavaliers round this table ready to maintain their lady's fairness as I do mine?'

"Again his eye ranged the table, passing over many an astounded face to fix itself on the bent black head opposite to him.

" 'Chevalier de Navarrenx,' he cried, and his voice rang like a clarion—'beau Chevalier de Navarrenx, what say you?'

"Navarrenx looked up with a surprised countenance; then, meeting Cosmo's provoking smile, he drew his brows together. But without giving him time to speak, Madame Andreassy, in a voice which her excitement pitched almost to a scream, cried out—

" 'M. de Navarrenx, Milord Cosmo Cameron desires to know if you will take up the glove in the name of any of the ladies he has to-night insulted—in the name of your neighbour, for example?'

"It appeared to me that the noted duellist, the almost professional swordsman, the man who had already more than one human life on his conscience, seemed annoyed, and required

a certain amount of *émoustillage* before making up his mind to take up this singular and irregular challenge—I believe, moreover, he had a real liking for Cosmo. But, with the latter's mocking smile in front of him and his mistress's fury at his elbow, the issue was inevitable. Indolently stretching his long limbs as one weary and discontented, he half rose from his chair, bowed profoundly to Madame Andreassy, and then nodded across the table at Cosmo, who let himself instantly fall back on his seat with a subdued cry of triumph.

" 'Bravo!—so that is arranged at last! Ah, Madame, if you knew how thankful I am! How nicely you have helped me out of the problem I was turning over! Sourdes, if your blood does not lie—and blood like yours could not—we shall give you to-night an entertainment after your own heart, I am sure. A tournament in your *cour d'honneur*.'

" 'To-night?' quoth the Vicomte, in goggle-eyed amazement. '*Tudieu*, how you are going it! A little affair of this kind——'

" 'Must be settled at once,' interrupted Cosmo, who added, including us all in that irresistible smile of his which made him look for the moment as candid and innocent as a child, 'because, you understand, if my wife knew, she would not let me see it out.'

"Navarrenx looked at his host resignedly,

and shrugged his shoulders. The Vicomte burst out laughing.

" 'Cosmo, my friend,' he cried, 'you are a veritable madman—this won't do!' But his eyes sparkled in his inflamed countenance.

" 'Bah, it must do, my dear Vicomte. M. de Navarrenx has no objection—have you, Chevalier? Well, then, it is a spectacle we give to these ladies to amuse them after these dull days. Settled, is it not?' "

"And so it was settled," said Marshfield. "If Cosmo had not been like a madman that night, as Sourdes said; if that excellent gentleman himself, as well as the rest of the company, had not been pretty considerably tipsy, and if Navarrenx had not been the fool of that little Greek devil, such a reckless piece of business could never have been planned, much less carried out."

"I thought you were never coming to the duel," said I. "You have a way of spreading your stories which even to my practised patience is a little trying. Well, now, what next?"

Marshfield laughed, not ill-pleased at my eagerness.

"The story is worth hearing," he declared confidently, and added; "One last detail

before I come to the climax. While M. de Sourdes, having rung the bell, roared out orders to his servants, while the ladies whispered and the men wondered, and Cosmo inhaled a cigarette with his eyes turned to the goddesses and cupids of the ceiling, Madame Andreassy suddenly laid her jewelled hand on Navarrenx's sleeve and tightened it there like a little claw. I bent to listen, and heard—

"'*Navarrenx*,' she whispered, '*tu vas me le tuer!*'

"He raised his eyebrow nonchalantly, and turned to his wine again.

"The scene outside, ten minutes later, was one which would be best reproduced by your modern draughtsman in counterchanged black and white. The storm had been followed by a dead calm, a complete anticyclone. The air was as still as in a closed room. The world lay silent under its thick mantle of snow; under the three-quarter moon riding high—it was then about ten o'clock—everything in the universe was dazzling white, or, by contrast, of densest black, save for the touch of colour given by the lighted windows, yellow upon the black walls, and the eight lanterns held by four piqueurs in the middle of the court of honour, which had that very morning been cleared of snow and neatly sanded, for the exercise of the stud under the Vicomte's own eyes.

"These huntsmen, summoned in haste upon an unknown errand (to be on the safe side with a master who was particular about smartness and entertained right old-fashioned notions upon the treatment of dependents), had donned the correct attire of their calling; and in the glare of their own illumination, cut out upon the white background, they stood forth, fantastic figures, belted, with hunting-knife on thigh and the great horn saltirewise. They had, no doubt, already seen many odd things in their days at La Motte-Herbault, but they must have been pretty well astonished at the procession which presently marched down the marble steps.

"First the Vicomte and a certain Colonel of Spahis, the latter armed with a stick, the former carrying the swords; both buttoned up in fur coats, as were also Messieurs Paradol and Marshfield, the appointed seconds, who came next. Lastly, coatless and bareheaded, but with cloaks thrown over their shoulders, Cosmo and Navarrenx, each with a cigarette between his lips, followed leisurely together, more like friends than men who were about to snatch at each other's life.

"The rest of the gentlemen flocked out to see the sport, but remained discreetly at the top of the steps. As I turned to look back, I saw an indistinct kaleidoscopic medley of shifting

silhouettes, moving behind the high windows of the hall: our fair companions were pressing their heads together close to the panes to watch this nineteenth-century tilt at sharps 'for the love of a lady.'

"What followed seems to me like one of those vivid dreams, that sort of dream which one remembers keenly in waking life. . . . Under the directing cane of the Colonel (who, I thought, did not walk very straight, but who nevertheless performed quite regularly his duties as master of the camp), the four huntsmen spread out, each holding his couple of lanterns shoulder high. Then M. de Sourdes called out cheerfully, 'Messieurs!' Upon which Navarrenx quietly removed his cloak, and Cosmo tossed his on one side. Then both advanced to take up the weapons that were handed to them crosswise, stepped back, and confronted each other—the Frenchman, with an easy bow and a restrained but intensely courteous and cavalierlike flourish of his blade, which flashed flax-blue in the moonlight; Cosmo, with a proud, vigorous, English military salute of the sword.

"Ah, if it had only been a claymore that he held, I perhaps would not have felt the tightening which, I don't mind confessing, then seized me by the throat. No doubt M. de Sourdes would never have consented to such

an irregular duel under his ægis had he really understood his Scottish friend, his fierceness, his foolhardiness, and his absolute ignorance of the conventions of that deadly art upon which his life now hung.

"The clock in the roof began to strike ten; somehow or other, as by tacit accord, every one waited till the last vibration of the last stroke had died away. Then, clearing his throat, the Colonel extended his stick, over which the sword points crossed, and, after a second, called out:—

" '*Allez, Messieurs.*' "

Here Marshfield paused, a little tantalisingly. We were then in darkness (amid the bushes of a side walk); the tip of the cigar he was reviving glowed fitfully.

"Well," he continued, "I said, as I was watching your friend this afternoon, that there was a good deal in fencing. Beyond the shadow of a doubt Manuel de Navarrenx, practised duellist though he was, would have been massacred in three seconds but for the marvellous precision which I understand now (after what I have seen to-day again) must become as a man's second nature before he can hope to resist a certain kind of opponent.

"Cosmo was no fencer, though he had fleshed his sword on more than one occasion during his brief soldier's career. But, in earnest, he was a tiger. Ah, I take it, M. de Navarrenx, who had dipped his point into some twenty French bodies and one Italian already, must have been astonished at the truly infernal onslaught of the inexpert Englishman! He first, indeed, broke ground for three paces beneath it; then, as if recovering his wits and coming to a sudden decision, stood firm again to meet, with unerring parries only, the tornado of iron, the shower of deadly stabs hurled at him, until the flashes of the blades, blue or yellow as they caught moon or candle light, with now and then a red spark of bruised steel, became bewildering to my starting eyes. Even to him it was a matter of life or death: the ground was bad, the light was bad; that mattered not for Cosmo in his mad ignorance, but the swordsman of twenty years' experience knew too much, I believe, to risk an attack or even a riposte in front of such reckless fury.

"And yet it was more than mere fury with my friend: it was all the gorgeousness of his happiness, of his pride, that was at stake in this insane freak—I really seem to have lived in his brain at that moment of intense excitement, as with hissing breath he furiously sought to pierce the impassable circles of his

antagonist's defence—it was the woman now waiting for him in the distant room, it was years more of her love, years more of that perfection on earth! I felt all that with him, and would then, I swear, have given my hand to see the Navarrenx hurled down, with Cosmo's swordhilt upon his chest. . . . But, as the great Bazancourt has it, 'principles in arms' will prevail.

"Well, Navarrenx did not risk an attack, as I said, but he found a loophole for a riposte, —a ferocious one! I was on the right of my man: I saw him stop short as if shot, the Frenchman's blade half-buried under his arm, as it seemed. The Colonel bounded forward and laid his cane against the sword that Cosmo was brandishing now above his head. Then only did Navarrenx attempt to withdraw his blade and step back just out of distance, where he remained, calm, quite correct, his point on the ground. I ran up—my hands were very cold and my face was burning. I saw a broad black patch appear on Cosmo's shirt, spreading rapidly wider and wider down to the hip. He did not fall, nor speak; but I heard him gnash his teeth.

" '*Palsambleu!*' said M. de Sourdes, approaching likewise and mopping his face.

" '*Saperlotte!*' said the Colonel, now, I fancy, quite sobered.

"And then, together, struck (a little late, I thought) by the same idea—

" 'And no surgeon!'

"At that moment Cosmo's sword escaped from his hand. I stood close by him, waiting for him to fall. Yet he stood. Only I fancied he swayed, and so I caught him under the arm.

" 'Badly hurt?' I asked.

" 'Think not,' he said, 'but beaten!'—this with a snarl—'I can't go on.'

" 'Bah, what of that?' cried I. 'My God, I thought you were dead! Dead—think of it . . . and of her!' I went on, helping him towards the steps, but hardly knowing what I was saying.

" 'By heaven, yes!' muttered he, panting still. 'What a fool I must have been to risk it! It was a narrow thing, Marshfield.' Then with an angry laugh that sounded most odd from a man besmeared with blood as he was: 'I did think, though, I was going to get in at last. But not a bit of it—stopped dead! I feel as if I was run through, clean open . . . yet I can breathe all right.'

"Here the Vicomte caught him on the other side. In this way we slowly marched into the hall in procession again, principals and seconds, huntsmen and all.

"Some of the ladies fled before the blood-

covered vision. Others hung on our flank, holding on to each other in tremulation. Madame Andreassy, seated amid the bearskins of a great divan that occupied the middle of the hall, watched us with affected indifference; but there was a sullen drawing in of her mouth. Indeed, there could be no doubt that, although defeated in the court of arms, Cosmo was still the hero of the moment: people were, unconsciously, so grateful to him for not being dead after all, and he looked so handsome and dauntless in his bloody shirt! And when the party approached her and she actually had to arise and give place to the wounded man, according to the directions of Sourdes, now intent only on his friend's behalf, the little woman who had had murder in her heart glanced blackly enough at the servant who had so incompletely executed her mandate. As a matter of fact, Navarrenx was gazing with much interest, but without a trace of vindictiveness, at his handiwork.

"If, as Cosmo had fondly imagined, it had been a narrow thing for his opponent, he himself had only escaped death by a hair's-breadth. Although not really dangerous, it was a wonderful wound! Navarrenx's riposte, fit to run through a Goliath, had, it was seen, entered under the breast; but, slipping on the ribs and tearing between flesh and bone, it had

but ploughed a deep and gaping furrow halfway round the athletic torso.

"A kind of whistle, expressive at the same time of astonishment and relief, came to Sourdes's lips as the case revealed itself.

" '*Tudieu!* friend Cosmo, a rogue boar could not have unstitched you in better style. But anything better than broaching the barrel, eh! aha! Two fellows have gone, grand gallop, for the doctor——'

" 'Hang the doctor!' said Cosmo promptly. 'Let Mathieu here'—pointing to the head piqueur, who was still holding the lantern at his head—'do the trick. I'll trust his skill sooner than any Pill-box or Sawbones. I saw him mend up your bitch Bella not five days ago, and the creature is fit as a fiddle already.'

"The old huntsman grunted approval. At a sign from his master, who also approved with one of his great 'ahas,' he ran off to procure his tools, and, on his return, in as business-like a manner as if one of his own hounds had been in question, screwing up his countenance into a comical twist, set about his task with rude but skilful fingers.

"In the reaction from the first emotion which every one had felt, if in different degrees, many of the men had fallen back into something of their former gaiety. Monsieur de

Sourdes, his legs apart, his arms akimbo, stood watching the operation with judicial interest; now making a suggestion full of sporting flavour, now laughing portentously at some joke of his own. Cosmo, half lying on the sofa, propping up his livid head (he had been bleeding like a pig) with his hand, looked into space, unheeding, absorbed it seemed in the bitterness of his defeat, and apparently callous to the pain he was enduring. Except Madame Andreassy, the ladies had now all retired; she stood at the further end of the great hall. Near her was Navarrenx, also apparently lost in reflection, for he did not speak. Behind them, again, an eager group of servants, wondering, no doubt, at the strange manners and customs of the masters.

"Just as the huntsman was about to apply a cool bandage to his neatly-concluded piece of work, there came on the stairs a sound of opening doors, of rustling garments and flying footsteps; the servants parted hastily, and Lady Cosmo burst in upon us.

"Enveloped in a great loose white cloth dressing-gown, an ivory brush in one hand, her hair unbraided, falling in royal masses around her, she had evidently rushed off just as she was, upon the first alarm. She swept upon one side the burly form of the Vicomte, who hastened to meet her, full of benevolent

reassurances, and threw herself upon her knees beside her husband.

" 'Cosmo, beloved!'

"The ring of anguish in her voice I shall never forget; to the crowd of those men around, who took most things in life, and love above all, so flippantly, it must have been a revelation. Cosmo raised himself, and the colour rushed to his face again.

" 'It is nothing,' he said earnestly—'nothing.'

" 'Wait, Madame,' interposed the piqueur, raising the bandage from the bloody flank, while a smile of conscious pride displayed his toothless gums—'only in the meat, see, and all well sewn up. . . .'

" 'Idiot!' cried Cosmo, with furious gesture, wrapping himself up in the bearskin—Though he had lost a deal of it, he had plenty of hot blood left in him. But the well-meaning brutality of the old fellow had carried conviction; Lady Cosmo drew a quick gasping breath, rose to her feet, straightened herself, and looked searchingly round the hall till her eyes rested upon Navarrenx the impassible, with the sword still in his hand. She then brought her gaze, dark with the recent terror, laden with a burning reproach, back to her husband.

" 'Cosmo,' she said, in a deep, vibrating voice, 'is our life together so slight a thing to you that you can play with it thus?'

"He hung his head like a chidden child. And in the almost breathless pause of wonder and admiration which this woman in her statuesque grandeur, with all her living beauty and her love-passion, imposed upon us, the laugh of Madame Andreassy, who now pressed forward to stare insolently upon the scene, sounded with vulgar incongruity. Lady Cosmo turned.

" 'You laugh,' she said; 'to you, Madame, it is amusing that a woman should go near to lose all that makes up life for her! What indeed can you, or such as you, understand by the love of an honest woman for her husband?'

"Madame Andreassy became scarlet. Thrusting her face forward, and in the abandonment of sudden fury planting her hands on her hips like a very fishwife, all the hidden depths of her native Levantine mud stirred within her came as it were frothing to her lips.

" 'Honest woman!' she cried with a screech. 'Rumour whispers not always so honest, nor was the present lover always the husband, my lady!'

"There fell for a second a terrible silence, as if every one were gathering the full enormity of this irretrievable speech. Then Cosmo wrenched himself half up from the sofa; his face was working with such an anger as I had

not yet seen on it, but he could not bring out a word; there was a sort of rattle in his throat. The Vicomte blushed to the top of his bald head. Navarrenx frowned. But Lady Cosmo, erect and stately, never wavered.

"With a motion full of dignity, she deprecated any interference from her host, and looking down from her magnificent height upon the creature who had insulted her:

" 'A woman who has sinned, I may be, Madame,' she said, in a voice as clear and true as a perfect bell, and to which her slight English accent in French gave an additional touch of sweetness. 'And my husband was indeed my lover first, when he could be nothing more. But if I have sinned once, Madame, it was for love—not for amusement. That no doubt is what you cannot understand. And if such love brings a happiness, a happiness which a woman such as you, who in love know nothing but the love of yourself and who light-heartedly risk your own lover's life to prop your vanity, can never conceive; if it brings joys beyond all words, it brings also pain, ever present and poignant—the pain of fear, the fear of loss. If I have sinned then—a subject with you for mockery—and if I deemed myself yet unforgiven, the anguish I have just endured, those years of terror I lived between my room and this place, during the time it took me to run

down here to-night—such agony must surely have expiated——!'

"She raised her hand to her forehead, where, as the impression returned upon her, great beads had gathered.

" 'Olivia!' cried Cosmo, his voice breaking on a kind of sob; then to me, growling like a wild cat, 'Marshfield, you fool, let me go!'

"Lady Cosmo seized her heavy hair with both hands and once more glanced upon us; the odd group of huntsmen gazing at her with stolid sympathy; the amazed, whispering servants; the gentlemen who, for an instant shaken from their flippancy and scepticism of mere men of pleasure, watched and hearkened in unconscious admiration; and she seemed to wake up suddenly, to awaken to her position. Her face and throat became suffused with crimson, and with a gesture all womanly, a shame almost divine, she sank again beside her husband and hid her face on his breast. He flung his arm around her, and over her bent head shot at us a look as proud again and as defiant as when he had proposed the toast.

" 'Eh! by the blood of my great ancestor,' shouted Sourdes, 'that is a woman! Milady' —laying a hand kindly and reverently upon her shoulder—'such love as that which you have so nobly spoken of is a very beautiful thing. But he returns it to you, your husband; and

well—*allez!* It was to uphold you as the fairest of all women that he staked to-night that life that is so precious to you. *Ah, l'heureux coquin!* We ought not to have allowed it. But all is well that ends well, as your "divine Williams" says. With all our admiration for you, we could not be so ungallant, we thought, as to drink his toast. And he fought—*jarnicoton!* fought, Milady, shed his blood like a *preux* chevalier of old, to maintain his word and his lady. And, *ventre-saint-gris!*' cried the noble gentleman, fairly enkindled by the recollection of the past no less than by the present power of Lady Cosmo's beauty, 'we recognise that he was right. What we have just seen has convinced us. Milady Cosmo Cameron *is* the queen of women, and as such we shall toast her now—what do you say, Messieurs?'

"Infected by his enthusiasm, moved too by their own, all the men acclaimed a loud consent (the more readily perhaps that none of their liege ladies were then present to witness the defection) all, except Navarrenx, who remained still motionless and dumb. When, however, Madame Andreassy, with now jaundiced face, crept up to him and plucked at his hand, hissing, 'Did I not tell thee to kill him?' he turned his long eyes slowly upon her; then, without speaking, shook off her touch as a man might a fly and advanced towards the couch.

"'Milord,' he said, seeking Cosmo's eyes, and as he spoke he bowed, and laid his blood-stained sword at his feet, 'you are wounded, it is true—it is a marvel you are not dead. But I am vanquished none the less. Sourdes, a glass for me!'

"As the servants bustled in with the wine, the Vicomte, whose Gallic blood seemed now fairly aflame, made a commanding gesture to the piqueurs, who unslung their horns and ranged themselves against the wall.

"'*Allons, vous autres, la fanfare d'honneur!*' he called out. '*Et vous, Messieurs, un rouge-bord!*'

"And as we each raised our own beakerful of ruby, the brazen horns struck up the old hunting flourish, the savage tune which has been handed down from those hardy ancient days when the gentlemen of France were more commonly of the type of our sturdy host himself. And I tell you, it has not been given to many to be transported, as we were that night, right back into the heart of a bygone century. The old walls round us, unchanged since the days of their royal master, must have deemed, at that splendid, wild blast, which made them ring again, that the past had risen before them once more. There moved the Vert-Galant himself, surrounded by his gallant gentlemen and his huntsmen, proclaiming, in his most

congenial style, the triumph of a grander, a more perfect woman than even the beautiful Gabrielle.

"In the midst of this barbaric clangour, through the circle of excited drinkers with now empty glasses, yet uplifted in ovation, in burst the little country doctor, blue with cold, fussy, encrusted to the knees with frozen snow—and behold!" said Marshfield, cackling, "we were back in our *fin-de-siècle* in double-quick time. I leave you to guess his amazement at the scene, and the prompt dispersal of all romantic illusion on his appearance. . . . And yet my last mental picture of that night was not without picturesqueness:—It was the spectacle of Cosmo's state retirement to his apartments, supported upon one side by the arm of his wife, upon the other by the very hand that had dealt him his wound. Madame Andreassy had disappeared. I never saw her again."

"And hereupon," concluded my friend, giving me one of his slipshod handshakes, "I must separate from you. The story is finished as far as interest is concerned. I have seen what I wanted to see—both assault and combat."

His voice died away and his form melted into darkness.

Across the open spaces, over the roofs, upon the wings of the easterly breeze, the distant boom of Big Ben striking the eighth hour carried me from the hunting-box in the depths of Sologne back into the heart of busy, humming London.

THE DEVIL'S WHISPER

The Devil's Whisper

This is the singular experience of a certain English student in the noble, ancient city of Mainz.

The case is in many ways curious, and may be worth recording as an unusual manifestation of the obscure mental disorder called Remorse. And the manner in which the Englishman came, most fortuitously, to be made acquainted with the drama in question, and even to play an actual part in its scenes, is not devoid of picturesque interest.

During the hour when it was fated that his path should cross that of the unfortunate man who had once listened to the devil's whisper the student was musing in the dim, low-ceiled wine-room, well known in Mainz, at the sign of the "Ducal Tun." It was a hot July afternoon. In that cool chamber—every decoration of which, elaborately quaint, ponderously archaic, aimed, in deference to the national bias, at adding romantic zest to the delight a German can pour out of a long-necked flask—he was installed by the small-paned window

which overlooks the cathedral porch, a flagon of Franconian wine at his elbow, and an open book under his dreaming eyes.

At the University this young man's studies, with ulterior views of academic distinction, bore among other things upon Philology. But the study of languages was with him a labour of love, an attractive pursuit; he found an ever fresh fascination in the cultivation of new systems of speech. During that summer the energies of his mind were altogether bent on mastering the intricacies of German phraseology. By favour of earlier circumstances he was already a very sufficient adept in many tongues of Latin root; he had, in fact, that singular power, rare in an Englishman, of assimilating, by keenness of fancy and intellectual sympathy, the spirit of other climes. Every newly acquired tittle of power in expressing that spirit by words and manners was to him, so to speak, what each fresh treasure is to the collector—a source of subtle personal pride, with all its attendant indescribable pleasures.

No one perhaps in modern times realised better the truth of the historic saying of the great Charles the Fifth of Austria and First of Spain:—"So many different tongues do I speak, so many different men can I be." Indeed, the English youth, who, at home, was

an undeniable Briton, with a disposition somewhat reticent and uncompromising and a ruling taste for work, when he lived in Spain imbibed with the sun-rays and the warm-coloured words something of the grandiloquent mode of thought and the grave laziness of that happy, self-admiring, easy-living country.

In Italy he grew good-natured and demonstrative, and feasted his soul in the rippling music of a tongue so bright and clear as to seem the only natural speech of man in happiness. In Paris he would become sceptical, fluent, and very precisely superficial, and be voted a pleasant companion, singularly un-English.

But the mighty German tongue was a harder conquest to undertake, although the undergraduate was already beginning to consort with its Gothic soul, and was once again experiencing the curious satisfaction of evolving brain-pictures out of an assemblage of hitherto unknown sounds. Some quatrains in the "Book of Songs" had newly made his heart beat with the unspeakable twilight longing which Heine, single among the world's poets, has fixed by human words; and aided by his imagination, he had already re-read in its own native music the epic legend of Doctor Faustus. But Teutonic prose was still fatiguing to unravel; and thus he had yielded to musing on

this sultry summer day, and abandoned his book—Hoffman's "Elixir"—at a fantastic but terrifyingly long sentence.

For some time he had been the sole occupant of the wine-room. Presently there entered to him one whom he remembered having noticed before about the town. This man, lithe and well-built, though of no great stature, had, beyond contest, a most characteristic presence, which once seen could hardly be forgotten.

His was a face of the most perfect masculine beauty, one to haunt the romantic fancy, with its clear-cut features and fiery dark eyes, deeply shaded under straight brows, the blackness of which seemed intense in contrast with a singularly even paleness of skin, and hair of dull copper hue. It was, as the Englishman thought at the first glance, a face which the best travelled man would hardly have expected to see out of a picture by Vandyck.

The stranger, after a vague salutation, took a seat at a neighbouring table, ordered wine, and then proceeded to reperuse, in lingering fashion, a letter, the contents of which he was evidently already master of. And, as he read, the student had opportunity to examine and admire him more particularly.

It was a noble countenance in repose; withal apparently a sensitive mirror of fleeting emotion.

"Verily here is one who must have turned many a woman's head," commented the observing youth, and, as he further marked the smile that ever and anon played on the other's lips, settled to his own satisfaction that the missive which could give scope for such drawn-out pleasure had been of a certainty penned by some woman.

At length the letter was refolded and replaced on the reader's heart, who then filled his glass with wine. A shaft of sunlight darting over the minster pinnacles in through the tavern window, broke itself in a golden splash on a corner of the brown oak table. The man, shifting his chair, placed his glass under the sun-shaft; and on the moment the beaker of ruddy Assmanshaüser, in the midst of the surrounding russet gloom, assumed the glory of some monstrous scintillating ruby.

Sympathetic to the glow of the wine, or so the Englishman thought, the stranger's eyes brightened, and, as he peered through the glass, his white teeth gleamed again under the red cavalier moustache. Yet his thoughts were not of wine, for he toyed with the glass without even tasting the liquid light. And presently he seemed to fall into a deeper reverie, while the brightness faded from his face; he rested his head on one hand, and with, what appeared a creeping melancholy,

absently watched the sun-ray travel from the glass along the table until it fell away and was lost on the dull floor.

For some time, from his coign of vantage, the Englishman sat pondering with lazy interest on the circumstances of this silent companion. Then the deep throbbing of the cathedral bell, warning of the flight of irreparable time, reminded him of the ever-present duty. He debated for a moment whether he would intrude on the stranger's privacy and amiably practise the German speech with him, or resume the unravelling of Hoffman's incurved sentences. The stranger's countenance made it seem possible that an interruption to what was clearly a dismal train of thought might not be unwelcome.

As he hesitated, the dreamer, likewise roused by the boom of the clock, with a sigh raised his eyes from the contemplation of his glass, looked around in an absent manner, and encountered the Englishman's glance.

"A sultry day, sir," he said, addressing him in German, with pretty civility.

The Englishman made suitable reply in the same tongue; but as they exchanged the further banalities of an opening conversation he was struck by an unusual intonation in his interlocutor's speech, and began to have doubts as to his nationality. Selecting his most fluent

and secure sentences, and delivering himself of these, he noted presently a quick look of interest, one which almost suggested anxiety, leap on to the sensitive face opposite him.

"You are a foreigner, sir," said the gentleman then with excellent command of the language, but with that outlandish qualifying tone that had already awakened the student's curiosity. "A foreigner, sir, are you not, if you will forgive my inquiry?"

"Yes, as you perceive, and hard at work upon learning German. I am English, but find your tongue hard to master." The last words were tentative. They should have elicited a similar declaration of nationality. But the stranger, the tension of his whole frame perceptibly relaxing, gave a slight sigh, and ignored the bait.

"Then I drink to your greater success," he said, and raised his glass. "You already speak with much correctness."

"It is very good of you to say so," vaguely responded the baffled Englishman.

"With your permission," then said the stranger more cheerily, and rising as he spoke, "I will sit at your table. What are you reading, you permit? Ah, the 'Devil's Elixir.' I do not know the book." Then, musingly— "How many people glibly talk and write of the

devil, who have never known him! Germans are especially fond of adverting to him, and swearing by him. 'The devil's in it,' they say, on slightest occasions. Oh, this is wrong! There should be less light talk of the great enemy." He spoke slowly, and the Englishman listened amused and curious. But, in trying to respond in extemporised phrases, he broke down in the unfamiliar speech, and again on a second trial came to a dead stop for want of verbs.

"I am ashamed," he said, blushing with vexation, "and after three months, too!"

The other smiled in benevolent sympathy. He was still fingering the book in front of him, on the open cover of which was a small book-plate; then pointing to the Latin epigraph under the crest—

"Patience, dear sir," he said, "the first steps are hard, but this motto of yours, *Propositi tenax*, is one which will lead you through greater difficulties than this German language. *Gaudet patientia duris.* I regret I do not know English myself."

As the Latin words escaped the speaker, with a certain archaic air of scholarship that was not without its quaintness, the young philologist pricked his ears; the riddle was solved; the hardness of the middle *s* and *e*, the guttural *x* were unmistakable indices. In none

but a Castilian school could this Latin have been learned.

With much of that sense of relief felt by the inexpert musician as he abandons the deciphering of an intricate piece for an old familiar favourite, the student played truant from his self-imposed school and lapsed from laboured German into fluent Spanish.

The result of this innocent departure was remarkable. From the first sentence the stranger grew livid, raised his head with a jerk, as though he had been struck, and clutching the edge of the table and pushing back his chair, stared a moment in silence at the amazed youth.

"What is this? What is the meaning of this?" he gasped forth at last, while a purple glow flashed into the dilated pupils of his eyes —whether from anger or dread it was impossible to distinguish. "Why do you speak to me in that language?" he asked again, and this time with obvious distress, unaware seemingly that he now used the same tongue himself.

The student was astounded; all he had said was, "Am I wrong, sir, in thinking that you speak Castilian?" and he would have added, "In that tongue at least my converse would not be an affliction to you." But the man's alteration of manner stopped him abruptly, and he made answer, when he had sufficiently recovered from his confusion—

"Why—why, because it is a language I know well, and love well. And my speaking it was meant in courtesy. But since you resent it, I crave your pardon—and I will retire."

His companion shook his head and gave a deprecating wave of his shapely hand.

"No, sir," he replied, motioning him down again in a markedly unconventional manner, "you must sit there."

The bidding was so singularly expressed that the student's first thought (that here was some criminal, intent on hiding his nationality and aghast at being detected) vanished as suddenly as it had taken shape. He sat down again; and there ensued a long silence. He could see the man's luminous brown eyes still fixed, but their speculation was now inwards.

"He is a madman," was the second thought; and to humour one who might be dangerous if thwarted—"Well, sir!" he said courteously, preparing to listen. At the ring of the Spanish words again the stranger drew in his breath and turned pale once more, while his countenance assumed a pathetic, deprecating, almost imploring look, which changed all vague thoughts of fear into what was almost sympathy.

"So you speak my language, sir," said his strange companion in a low voice and with his eyes cast down; "what a misfortune—what a

misfortune! Ah me! that you should have spoken! Now you must listen. I must trespass on your time, for you must hear."

He drew his chair closer, thrust his arms forward on the table, and twisted nervously the signet ring he wore on his little finger. Then, sighing faintly, he raised his eyes full on his companion; and compelling and holding his attention, began his say—

"You have now to hear what *really* happened, it is already many years ago, in the officers' room at the Military School of Segovia, between a young man whose forefathers had all stainlessly borne these arms, and Ramon Echegorri, an honourable man, once a sergeant in the Regiment-Loyalty. It has to be told, and you must hear it."

His voice had changed after the first few words and assumed a strange character; it was low, yet limpid in its great precision, and absolutely toneless, as though the speaker read out a mere statement. The contrast between the voice and the words from the outset impressed the listener, who, now quite recovered from his alarms, began fervently to hope that the stillness of the wine-room might not prematurely be disturbed.

"I must assure you, sir, that, up to that day, the young officer was blameless of aught that befits not a gentleman. And yet then he did,

for no reason than can be urged in excuse, that which it turns me sick to remember. Many and many a time have I marvelled how much less dreadful some vulgar crime of blood or treason, which might be expiated in manly fashion, would be to look back upon. But this youth's action was merely one of low cunning. It was not even theft. When I think of it, I think as of putrid dust, of obscene spittle." There was no change in the man's voice; but the listener, enthralled by this passion of contempt, could see a dew of sweat-drops gathering on his temples.

"It is good that you should know," the voice went on. "This young man was one of a party of ensigns sent to Segovia to work out a course. They were very strictly kept, and were naturally not allowed much money. This Ramiro I speak of, a little older than the greater number, was the most likely candidate for the first place at the coming examination. He was a keen and hard-working youth; one, I proclaim, who had then the stuff in him for a good man. It was two days before the passing out, and he had received a small sum of money from his family, who, though of ancient race and good position, kept him, on principle, to the simple necessary during his probation. Strict was the discipline in the school on matters of payment.

"All was well up to that day; all was well

even up to the night, although the money which was to pay for the month's catering was no longer his. He had been a fool that day, but had not yet stooped. But, in the evening, as he sat in the officers' room, deserted then and gloomy, warming himself at the brazier, even as Peter before his treachery—for it was bitter cold and the town was soft with snow—a fatal shabbiness of mood began to defile his mind. His thoughts were dismal and cold as the air outside as he bent them on the missing moneys; recalling with contempt how but an hour before they had been yielded, as in a dream, and passed into the bosom of the gipsy-girl, to win one by one a smile and a song from her red lips; recalling with white fury how, in mocking ceremony, the little demon had restored to him at the last one of the smallest coins—the sole occupant now of his miserably flat purse—as a superstitious sacrifice to luck, no doubt, before thrusting him forth into the snowy road, gibing at him for the booby that he was.

"And now, with elbows on his knees and head resting in his hands as he gazed into the burning brazier, he pondered. Would he be believed if he claimed to have lost his funds by accident? Yet, so lost they must appear. A manly confession of the true use made of what was due to the military chest would be ruinous

to his prospects. The lie must be told. This was the first step downward; one, you see, he could hardly avoid. So the young man drew his last piece; he called the steward and ordered his evening coffee, and tossed the coin to him.

"This steward was an honourable man; a fine and good soldier, strong and straight; his great chest was bright with the crosses of many actions. He was a Basque. His name was Ramon Echegorri, and, as I said, he was a man of probity. This man spoke to the young officer with respectful interest. He was only a sergeant, but had seen much fighting, and the officer was on the threshold of his career.

" 'I am told, Sir Lieutenant,' said he as he brought the cup, 'that you are most like for the first place. I shall rejoice to hear it so. It is good the book-work will soon be over, for you look more fatigued than I have seen you before.' Such were his words, and they were kind.

"And when this Ramon had retired, the officer, thinking of the morrow, and how it might well be that he had already jeopardised almost sure success by one hour of folly, was seized again with fury against himself. He flung the empty purse into the red fire, and cursed his fortune. In the next room the steward was piling up the day's cash, and the chink of coin, faint as it was, was grievous to

the ear. He walked out of the room, down the great icy stairs, out once more into the white and black streets, devising where he should lose his money. And then the thought that the brass rings of the purse might be found in the brazier stopped him short—I remember where this thought occurred; it was under the arch of the aqueduct which towers over the housetops. And although this was but a trivial thing after all, it struck colder at my heart than the wind that hissed among the old stones."

The speaker, unaware of his self-betrayal, turned his agonised gaze here appealingly upon the listener, who, seemingly bound by something of the same spell, hung silently upon his words.

"This was the beginning of the evil itself, although I assure you, sir, that it was yet unformed and unadopted. If we believe in the devil, it was he who at that moment whispered to me: 'The rings of the purse!' . . . Anyhow, the officer returned, half running, to the room, intent only on seeking among the coals for the unconsumed evidence. But, as he entered, panting with the hurry, he found the sergeant again.

"The man turned to him inquiringly. He had a pleasant, smiling face.

" 'Forgotten something, my Lieutenant?' he

asked, and looked round and about with polite solicitude.

"'Yes—yes, Echegorri. I think I left my purse on the table.' This time it was the devil himself who spoke, for the officer had not intended saying that. And as soon as the lie was out, cold again seized him by the heart. The blood flew to his head. But it was said. Ah me! sir, you see, it was said.

"Ramon Echegorri turned grave on the instant. He cast his eyes quickly around once more, and then firmly looked into his officer's eyes, saying—

"'No, my Lieutenant, you have not left it here.' The young man's heart trembled. But there was no retreat possible.

"'I have left it here, Echegorri. In fact, I remember placing it on that table. You must inquire at once.' Echegorri shook his head. It seemed as if his honest brown eyes filled the whole space of the room with their blaze—

"'I tell you, sir, no one has been here but myself.'

"The soldier knew that his officer lied, and told him so to his face, by the tone if not by the words. And now the younger man felt that he was actually assailed; with the instinct of self-preservation he clutched desperately at the suggestion of infinite malice, unknown till then in his soul.

"'Sergeant Echegorri,' he said roughly, 'stand to order and beware. I can still let you off; but that purse I must have back.'

"But even as he spoke his guilty eyes wandered unconsciously towards the brazier. In an instant the sergeant saw, and it seemed to me as if he understood all. Oh, the curse of that instant! I boldly took the prompting whisper of the devil.

"There was still a smell of burnt silk hanging upon the air. I sniffed the nauseous odour and affected to be struck by a sudden idea: 'My purse!' cried I, in a voice of thunder. In one stride I was by the fire and peering into the coals; a little green flame danced over the embers; with the tongs I drew forth the fatal rings and shook them in the sergeant's darkling face. 'Oh, fool!' I called out, 'you have betrayed yourself. Now where is the money?'

"He gave me but one look, and with a contempt one would think unwarrantable under any circumstances in a subordinate towards his superior, turned his back upon me, saying, 'You know that better than I do.'

"Footsteps were ascending the stairs. I heard them. 'Where is the money, and no more insolence?' I cried, beside myself. He swung on his heels and turned to me again with burning eyes, stamping his foot in sudden indignation; we were both goaded to madness.

'No insolence, man!' I screamed; 'you stand here a self-convicted thief, Sergeant Echegorri.'

"I had hardly spoken before the stroke of his open hand fell on my cheek with a fury that seemed to fill the room with flames. To be struck by a sergeant!

"I would have sought my sword to kill him, but my wrist was paralysed in his grip, and at that moment two officers entered upon us. Suddenly recalled to reason, he stepped back from me and stood silent, awaiting his fate. The guard was called up and the innocent man, guilty of a capital offence, was marched away forthwith."

The speaker paused. The dark flush which had suffused his face slowly ebbed away, but his right cheek remained curiously marked with an angry redness, as if still stinging from the shaming blow. His eyes were fixed on the Englishman. In the respite there came to the latter floating thoughts of the Ancient Mariner and "his glittering eye"; but here the deed confessed was of human interest, and, unlike the wedding guest, he longed to hear further. Yet he spoke not a word, unconsciously fearing to break the spell.

After a silence, slowly measured by the beat of the Nuremberg clock high on the wainscoting, the tale was resumed in precisely the

same tone, and as if answering an unspoken query.

"No, sir, the man was not shot. But what mattered that? The whole night was spent by the young officer over his books; it was as if the slap in the face had cleared his head of doubt; his brain was active, luminous. On the morrow he stood before the commandant of the place and reported, with simple military brevity, the remarkable disappearance of his money, the melancholy and suspicious behaviour of the hitherto blameless and trusted sergeant, ending up with his insane assault on a superior. The commandant was much struck by Don Ramiro's excellent and moderate bearing, and still more so when, the official report being over, the latter begged, with much feeling, that only the undeniable and military crime of striking an officer should be charged against the culprit, and not the question of theft to the shaming of the Regiment-Loyalty.

"'A refined sentiment of military honour, young man,' said the commandant, who had belonged to the Loyalty himself; 'never lose that spirit. As for the sergeant, it will be as you wish.'

"And the magnanimous youth went on his way once more under the black aqueduct, with upright bearing, toward the examination room.

As every one expected, he passed out first, and thus began a brilliant military career. He never saw Echegorri again, save on the day of trial. The prisoner's offence was of course inexcusable under any provocation; the question of provocation, moreover, for the reasons I have mentioned, was, by the direction of the commandant, strictly kept back. By special mercy, in consideration of his meritorious services, the man was only condemned to the penal settlements. It was noticed that, at the reading of the sentence, he looked up at his accuser long and darkly, which was attributed to baffled hatred; and that the accuser blushed deep, but only on the side that had been struck by the culprit, and that was put down to his generous blood.

"And this, sir, is the true story of Ramon Echegorri," said the Spaniard, who now took away his eyes from the Englishman's face.

Then, with a laugh that sounded perilously like a sob, he dropped his forehead on both his hands, and, in that posture, remained long absorbed in brooding.

The chime of the half-hour fell solemnly from the cathedral tower into the sombre room.

The student was a man of broad and generous views for all his still young years.

He did not require to meditate much on this miserable tale to realise the long expiation, untold in actual words yet so poignantly patent. He reached across the table and touched the stranger gently on the arm. There was a sympathetic quality in the contact, and the man looked up at once. On his face, now tired and drawn like that of one just free from a racking trance, there was a look of astonishment.

"You have heard," he murmured wonderingly — the inflections of waking life had returned to his speech. "You are, no doubt, a man of honour, and yet——"

The Englishman raised his hand in denegation. Choosing his words with decision, as a mental surgeon rapidly and tenderly dealing with a wounded mind: "I have heard," he said, "a tale of fate—of the irremediable consequences of an act more thoughtless than intrinsically evil—I have heard the tale of a moment's temptation, despicable enough in itself, but the results of which were not foreseen, and therefore not weighed. I have heard, above all, a tale of never absent remorse, and I remember (although I am not given to that sort of quotation) that there is mercy for every sin."

The Spaniard had listened to the young man's indulgent casuistry with a countenance

of doubt, yet not untouched by relief. "You are the only one," he said, with a weary voice, "who has ever listened to my story with sympathy—and such sympathy is balm to me," touching his heart with a pathetic look. "Indeed, you are the only man who has heard it to the end. When this incomprehensible vertigo, this fatal impulse to unfold the true account of my dishonour seizes me, men generally escape, with deprecatory words, as from a madman."

"And, if I might advise you, sir," said the Englishman, his native practicality coming once more to the fore, "it would be to curb, once for all, this tendency—no doubt arising from a penitential spirit—thus to accuse yourself of a dead and past misdeed to the casual stranger. It is time, believe me, to shake off an incubus which, (it may even be argued) could not continue to feed upon your mind were it not in essence a loyal and generous one. This pragmatic impulse will degenerate into madness if you do not take care."

"It is already so, beyond doubt," said the Spanish gentleman, stroking his forehead with distressful gesture. "In all other respects I am miserably sane, but the impulse, when it comes, is unconquerable. Men have been known, on the brink of a precipice, to be so drawn as to fling themselves into its horror.

The language which I used for my sin I have now to use for my punishment. I cannot, as you have seen, even hear the beautiful, the noble tongue of my country without also hearing that call which *has become irresistible.* I sought a cure in flight, in the sound of other speech in other lands, and thought I had found in this exile of mind and tongue, peace at last. To-day's events prove how futile is the hope."

He paused for a while, with his head resting on his hand, gazing in desolation at the strip of blue through the open window. Presently he resumed:

"The curse came upon me only when one would have thought the sin of my youth might well have passed into oblivion even in my own mind. It was years after. I bore on my tunic then as many crosses almost as did Ramon Echegorri once. I had proved myself a good officer, a humane soldier, a loyal gentleman—with that one exception you know of. It was as if God himself had forgiven. Everything prospered to me. I had come into my title, and an unexpected fortune. I was well known in the world, of high repute in my service.

"After the Carlist War it was my fate to return to Segovia, this time as a staff examiner. One evening, in the officers' casino, as I

was conversing pleasantly after cards, and when nothing was further for the moment from my mind than the stings of remembrance, despite of my surroundings, a soldier brought in the day's mails.

"'The captain has had some good news,' cried an officer beside me as I opened the first letter, and the whole friendly company looked round smiling at my flaming cheek. You have doubtless noticed, sir," said the Spaniard, interrupting his story, "this curious infirmity of mine, this brand of shame upon which, in this very room, I felt your eye but a little while ago. How could I ever have thought the wrath of God allayed when this warning had never quitted me; when at all moments of deep emotion, more especially in hours of elation and pride, it grew so conspicuous, though understood of me alone, as to have become a byword among my comrades? And thus they called to me that night: 'Is it a new decoration, Don Ramiro, or a new appointment?'

"What the letter said I can repeat word for word; I have it in my eyes as when they first read it. After the compliments which it is usual with us to prefix to all courteous communications, it went on thus:—

"'When you receive this letter, forwarded by the Father confessor against prison rules,

and which therefore you must destroy once read, Ramon Echegorri will be dead of this prison fever. I have, by my suffering Saviour's mercy, lost all hatred for you, for the prison surgeon has assured the good Father that I have little time to prepare for death. You have made me suffer, sir, greatly; I never harmed you, and even in thought and deed have done you well. But, on my hope of salvation, I wish you to know that at my last hour I have forgiven you.'

"There the letter ended with ceremonious formula, as befitted the relations of a common sergeant with a gentleman of position, his officer.

"Had he cursed me, I think I could have borne it; but his forgiveness struck at my heart. It struck at my brain. What had for these years been but a dormant canker in my secret self became from that moment aroused to virulent disease.

"By-and-by, amid the constant effort to conceal from my honourable associates the misery that was consuming me, there grew a new and horrible desire to clean my soul of the unsavoury tale. I first began to yield to the mania in indirect fashion; narrated hypothetical cases similar to mine. But, like a drunkard, the craving increased as I compromised with it. The next step was to tell the story in its

entirety, concealing only names and places. People began to look askance; I was becoming a dreaded infliction. In time the inevitable occurred. A friend whom I met alone in a railway station, changed his carriage at the next station, without apology. He took me for mad. . . .

" 'I assure you, my officer,' said a rapscallion host at Avila, with an impudent grin as he presented me with a bill quadruple of the right amount, 'I feel certain that you are able to pay your score; you will not find here your purse in the brazier.' He took me for a vulgar rogue like himself. . . . I paid and fled.

"At last, I found myself pouring forth my infamy to my best friend, the man I most esteemed. He knew I spoke the truth.

" 'My dear comrade,' he said, 'you are too ill to remain with us. It will not do. Some of us might one day begin to imagine there was a background of fact to these ravings of yours. After your honourable services it is but just that you should now think of yourself. I would recommend travel, prolonged travel . . . abroad.'

"I can never forget the scorn of his look, the coldness of his voice. I sent in my demission. He also obtained leave, and never quitted me till I was out of the country. We had faced death together only the year before,

but the honour of the regiment was dear to him.

"The mills of God grind slowly," went on Don Ramiro, "but I believe He will yet spare me a remnant of livable life. Here in this country I have first found peace. I knew a little German; and in a strange language the maniac impulse has never made itself felt. And of late I had even begun to think I might taste happiness again.

"Now you know how it is that what should be the sweetest sound to an exile's ear, the sound of my mother tongue, has become to me the most dreaded. I have never yet heard it in these parts; and when it came from your English lips it was unexpected indeed, and once more turned the old tide full against me."

"I regret it," said the Englishman, with some feeling.

There fell a long silence upon the two men. At length, with a deep sigh, Don Ramiro roused himself, and rising as if to take his leave, said, speaking German once more—

"I thank you, sir, for your patience with me, and your sympathy."

"Give me your company a little longer, pray," returned the student heartily, he too resuming the German tongue in tacit acquiescence, "and if you will but prolong your indulgence to my linguistic labours, I shall feel

that I may order another bottle with a clear conscience."

And in this new mood they sat together discussing the wine and such desultory subjects as came to mind, until the student began almost to feel as if the secret buried between them had been but a dream of his own active brain between the two bottles of subtle and generous Rhenish.

As they walked at length together out of the cool, dim wine-room into the mellowing sunlight and parted at divergent streets, only a spirit of perhaps exaggerated delicacy prevented the Englishman from begging that this meeting might not be the last.

For many days he haunted the tavern at likely hours; lingered in the public gardens and searched through throngs of broad-visaged Teutons for a glimpse of the Vandyck head, in vain. By-and-by he grew to think that the Spaniard was determinedly avoiding him; and the old city having exhausted its interest for him, he prepared to wing his flight to some other quaint haunt wherein congenially to prosecute his investigation of the German speech.

But one afternoon shortly before his proposed departure, as he was strolling, as usual book in hand, along the red sandstone quays that curb the mighty flow of the Rhine,

he lighted once more on his singular acquaintance.

Each absorbed, one in his book, the other seemingly in his thoughts, they only became aware of the encounter when already face to face. Whether it was pleasing or not to the Spaniard it would have been impossible to tell; with exquisite breeding he saluted his companion and extended his hand.

"Always at work, my dear sir, I see. I admire your industry." He spoke in the odd precise German already familiar to the student; his manner was easy, as of one who had only parted from an acquaintance a few hours before. There was a stronger ring in his tone, a new elasticity in his bearing which instantly struck the Englishman. With quick scrutiny he scanned the speaker's countenance and discovered also a new serenity, a look almost of happiness.

They stood a moment in converse, and then walked together some little distance, talking on indifferent topics with much mutual civil deference. It was then that the explanation of the changed bearing of Don Ramiro came upon the wondering undergraduate, and that he remembered him of the letter the Spaniard had so long lingered over on the day of their first meeting.

A sentry, mounting guard at the gates of one

of the noble red mansions overlooking the river, suddenly presented arms; and with loudly clanking sword, a square grey-whiskered man in colonel's uniform emerged from the wide portals, accompanied by a young girl in fluttering summer dress. At sight of the latter the Spaniard's eyes shot fire; and, although he had too much inborn courtesy to show it, it was evident that his tavern-friend's company had become inopportune. But before the latter could take an unaffected leave, the officer and his fair companion had drawn close and exchanged greeting with Don Ramiro.

And now, according to the etiquette of the land, in answer to an inquiring glance, the Englishman had to be introduced, and this the Spaniard did with good grace.

"Mr. Marshfield, an English student," he said, mentioning the name, "who has come here to study German." And having likewise presented the officer as the Colonel commanding the Dragoon regiment in garrison and his future father-in-law, Don Ramiro, without taking apparent notice of the impression produced by the announcement thus incidentally conveyed to the possessor of his secret, devoted his attentions to the lady. Of her the undergraduate forthwith took curious and interested note as a pretty, plump specimen of the dark

German, pleasing enough, though not perhaps the mate he would have fancied for his romantic-looking mysterious Spaniard.

There could be no doubt, however, that the couple were deeply enamoured; there was a pathetic tenderness in his eyes, as they rested upon her; and she, with all the national abandonment in matters of intercourse between betrothed, showed herself wrapt heart and soul in her handsome cavalier.

As a sequel to this incident the Englishman, in his character of friend to the bridegroom-elect, found himself at once treated with amiable consideration by the colonel, and invited, as a matter of course, to the ante-nuptial festivities of the *Polterabend* which were to be celebrated the next day. The betrothal, it seemed, was already of long standing, and from the officer's converse it was evident that it gave general happiness.

Now, although the student was not without some misgivings, whether it would not be the more kindly act, in the circumstances, to avoid the invitation he had at first so warmly accepted, his constitutional curiosity and his interest in the strange bridegroom finally overrode the delicate scruples; and thus the next evening he found himself one of the seething crowd in the great rooms of the colonel's house, where the pot-breaking and other traditional methods of

merry-making were being carried out with typical thoroughness and clamour.

An utter stranger, and naturally somewhat lost among so many, he was quite content to play the simple part of spectator; and unable even to approach the bridal pair, only caught occasional glimpses of Don Ramiro's countenance, pale yet radiant, and of the bride's darkly glowing face, somewhat too obtrusively sentimental for his English taste.

As the last hour drew near, and the fun was fast and furious, there came a sudden interruption to the usual course of proceedings which gave him again an undesired activity in connection with the Spaniard's affairs. The host, standing on a chair, was demanding silence in the voice of one long accustomed to instant obedience, and a comparative lull inspired by vivid curiosity fell on the good-humoured assembly. The student pressed forward with the rest.

At the table reserved for the family and their intimates there had evidently been a hearty succession of toasts. Just then most of the countenances round it were exchanging benevolent glances of intelligence, becks and wreathed smiles. The bride, blushing more deeply than ever, was standing, a slender beaker foaming in her hand, her swimming eyes fixed upon Don Ramiro, who, with a look

of smiling mystification, was just rising to his feet.

"My betrothed," she began, with not unbecoming confusion at hearing her own voice in the midst of the expectant silence, "you have covered me with presents, the most magnificent, the most lovingly devised; but I too have for you a special gift to show my love and constant thought. It has been difficult to secure, and even more difficult to keep secret from you till now. I want to be praised," she added, "both for keeping it so well and for my diligence." She smiled on him with ponderous coquettishness; and subdued guttural exclamations, sentimentally greeting her little speech, rustled through the room.

And now the Englishman's heart almost stood still; the bride was no longer speaking German. God of Mercy! these were Spanish words that fell upon the air! "My beloved," she was saying with triumphant enunciation, "I drink to thee, to our happiness. I am proud to tell thee——" She broke off in amazement, and there followed an instant's breathless silence; nothing for a moment was heard but the rain-drops of the storm that had been brewing all day, beating on the panes.

At the first fatal words Don Ramiro had thrown his hands forward with a terrified, deprecating gesture. As she went on, from

his open mouth came unformed sounds such as escape a man only in the horror of nightmare.

Speechless, he despairingly clapped his palm on his lips in adjuration for her to stop. And then, in the silence, above the driving of the rain came his voice at last, exhausted and complaining as that of a dying man.

"What is this?" he murmured, looking round unseeingly; "what is the meaning of this? Oh! why do you speak to me in Spanish? Ah me! Love of my soul, that you should have spoken! Now you must listen—you too must hear. Come! Come away!"

No one, perhaps, but the girl and the Englishman understood his language—none but the latter the real meaning of his words; and in the confusion that ensued he instantly decided to interfere. He cleaved without ceremony the crowd of guests that gathered thickly round, calling out in Spanish, to the increased astonishment of every one—

"Don Ramiro, conquer this weakness!" Then turning to the terrified girl and pointing to his heart, "Be not too much alarmed, madam," he said, plunging into the first excuse that came, "my friend is subject occasionally to these attacks. I know he will be better presently, but I must attend to him"—and, seizing the Spaniard by the wrist and shoulder, he fairly rushed him out of the room.

To his own astonishment he found that the unfortunate bridegroom only offered passive resistance, and suffered himself to be dragged without expostulation through the first open door into the garden, and thence into a back street. The evening was dark; it rained in torrents; the wind blew in fitful gusts, and the streets were abandoned. The two men, bare-headed and uncloaked under the downpour, were spared the intrusive observation of passers-by.

They walked, almost ran, silently for some time, in unknown ways, without a word. A chance turning in the intricate network of small alleys brought them presently into a blind lane, and so to a standstill. The Englishman released his grip, and, placing his back against a wall under a dim-blinking street-lamp, faced his companion and addressed him with forced cheeriness.

"Well," said he, "you are better, are you not, Don Ramiro? The *vertige* is over. Shall we return now? The spell is broken, you know. It was lucky I was there; but now it is conquered. Courage, Don Ramiro, be a man!"

But Don Ramiro made no answer. He held his face raised to the spilling rain; his eyes were closed. Along his drawn cheeks the drops ran down in rivulets; the student

thought they were mixed with tears, and, at his wits' end, he abruptly ceased what seemed but a patter of foolish words in the presence of irremediable misery. Presently he heard in the distance the rattle of a cab, and thought of endeavouring at least to convey this stricken man to shelter. He ran to the turning and hailed in his lusty young voice. Then he looked round for his comrade, apprehensive to have left his side even for a moment. But the dim spaces were empty, and as he ran hither and thither, desperately calling on his name, he caught a glimpse of a dark, bent figure, slinking with the swift, self-effacing motion of a cat, round a distant turning.

And the path of the Spanish gentleman's life, from that moment, diverged from that of the student for ever.

THE HERD-WIDDIEFOW

The Herd-Widdiefow

This is my great-grandmother's story as she told it to my grandmother, and as my mother heard it from my grandmother's lips.

It is still a favourite story for a winter's evening by the hearth when the lassies sit to their spinning; and I have known not a few to sigh in secret for the old evil days when a woman's heart was ever ready to spring to her mouth at a footstep outside, and when none knew if the cow were safe in the byre, or the bonnie lass in her chamber, for fear of the reiving, thieving Highlandman — the Herd-Widdiefow, as such a fellow was known in his own uncouth tongue! But I for one have never ceased to regret that my great-grandmother should have sat brooding by the fire, that September night a hundred and fifty years ago, instead of drawing bolts and bars and fastening up the house; for by that lazy fit of hers did our good Lowland farm come into the hands of the Highland race, and our good Lowland name become exchanged for an ill-sounding, heathen one and the fine breed of

Haseltine suffer the intermixture of the fierce, wildcat, mountain blood. Whereby a family that had been noted for straight limbs, sleek skins and canny heads, have brought forth ever since little else but swarthy, hairy, squat-figured loons, and thriftless black-eyed lasses; settle-to-naught and ne'er-do-weels.

Now my great-grandmother was an only child and a great match the whole country side over. She was a comely dame, I have heard my mother say, even as she had known her in her old age; and when she was young, so the legend goes, her hair was the colour of the inner husk of the chestnut, and the skin of her face was as pink and white as the wild roses in the hedgerows. Her name was Margaret. And being, as I say, his only child born to him after long years of barren wedlock when he himself was an old man, 'twas but natural that her father should yearn to see her wed before he died.

Her heart inclined to a cousin of her own, John Haseltine by name; a true chip of the old block, with the bluest eyes between Tyne and Clyde. And her father approved of her choice. John Haseltine the younger had been seven years at Hazelburn, working under his uncle. He was a douce lad, so tall that my great-grandmother, who was a tall woman, had to look up to him and to stand on tip-toe if she

wanted to kiss him. He had a slow way with him and a slow speech, but he never did nor said anything that was not to his advantage; and my great-grandmother thought that they would be very happy and that he would take good care of the farm and of herself.

On the night I am telling you about, a September night, with an angry wind and a storm brewing behind the hills, the master of the farm and all the men, who had worked from dawn at bringing in the harvest before the rain should come, were dog-tired; so tired that old John had snored over his supper and young John had fallen asleep even as he sat, according to his wont alone with his betrothed after the rest had retired. He looked a very fine figure of a man, my great-grandmother thought, as he lay back beside her with his legs outstretched and his curly head propped against the angle of the oak settle. The sun had burnt his face deep red, but where the shirt lay open at the neck, his skin was as white as her own.

But, all at once, as she sat gazing at him, her heart grew hot and angry against him, she could not have said why; and she flounced away from him and knocked over the creepy stool. John Haseltine sat up with a start.

"Faith, Meg," said he, and smacked a kiss upon her cheek, and yawned, "I believe I have been noddin'."

Whereupon he rose and staggered, sleep-drunken, from the room, and she heard his heavy stumbles on the wooden stairs as he mounted to his bed in the loft.

Thus was my great-grandmother left alone in the kitchen, all the household a-bed but she. She drew the creepy stool to the hearth and sat looking into the embers. What had come upon her she never knew to her dying day, whether it was the scent of the hay that had gone to her head or the gathering storm that had turned her sour like the milk; but there was nothing but black bitterness within her breast against all the world, above all against her good John.

The thunder began to rumble overhead and the hail hissed down the chimney, and she was glad, because it just suited her mood. The windows rattled and the doors shook as the blast raged round the house; and glancing over her shoulder, she saw that John had forgotten to draw the bars and bolts as was his nightly duty.

"Plague take the sleepy loon," said she. "I trow I have a pretty life before me!"

She rocked herself backwards and forwards, staring at the turf that was crumbling away

into white ash, and rubbing her cheek with her hand where it had been kissed by him.

"Upon my word," said she, "I might as well have been Aunt Deb, for all the warmth in his lips!"

The thunder crackled, down came the rain as if all heaven's sluices were opened. The lightning flashed this side and that. Uneasily the cattle began to low without; it seemed as if between the noise of the thunder and rain and the wind, she could hear the patter of their feet drawing close to the house for shelter. Suddenly the yard dog raised a fierce clamour, and as suddenly fell silent. And then the thunder roared again and swallowed all.

"The dumb beasts know there is danger," thought she, and her lip curled, "but overhead they lie like logs, and the place might be burnt about our ears, before they would think of turning on their pillows."

Now, even as she thought this to herself, there came the most terrible thunder-clap there had been yet, so that it was as if the whole sky had turned into metal and was breaking itself upon the world; and the lightning hissed across the sleeting rain. She sprang to her feet, clasping her hands and gazing around in terror.

Then, even in the shimmering of the lightning, she saw a face looking in upon her through the window—a man's face, strong and

wild, with teeth and eyes gleaming white. The next instant it was gone with the flash.

She stood terrified, straining her ear; the storm still growled and grumbled, but it was wearing away. The rain came lighter and steadier and the blast was dying off, but there were strange rumours without; the patter of feet and hoofs on the soft ground, whispers of muffled voices, and the cattle were lowing with angry plaintive note. Yet the yard dog was silent.

"Things are no canny the night," said my great-grandmother. Then she tried to laugh at herself.

"I am going daft!" said she, and poked the dying embers into flame. After which, emboldened by the cheerful light and the familiar objects around her and the relief of the returning serenity outside, she walked across the floor to draw the bolts of the great door. She was raising the main bar (and though she was a strong lass it was a hard job for her) when there rang a crash of broken glass upon the bricks under the kitchen window, and, before she had even time to call out, something leaped upon her with the spring of a mountain cat. A hand was clapped over her mouth, she felt herself seized and held. She fought hard, all her sturdy womanhood at bay, but the grip that held her was as strong as

steel. There was a chuckle in her ear as if of triumph.

The next moment a heavy plaid, reeking of peat smoke, was flung over her head, stifling her cries. This was so wound and knotted about her that her arms were pinned by her side; and in a trice she had become as helpless as an infant in its swaddling clothes. Then she was whipped from her feet and borne away at a quick, steady trot, and she felt the fresh outer wind flutter her petticoats and blow against her feet, which were all she had free.

"He will be a strong man," she thought, however, "who can carry the finest wench in the dale many yards at such a rate." And she struggled on with might and main. Little it helped her. In another minute she was flung across the saddle-bow of a horse with no more ado than if she had been a bag of meal, and with legs hanging, dangling one side and head the other, she was borne through the night at a cruel pace.

All was now a blank and hideous medley to her till the time (she knew not whether it came after minutes or hours) when she found herself delivered from her bonds and placed erect before her captor with the free air upon her burning face. Afar away they must have ridden, for by the dim light, the waste where they now halted looked all strange to her.

And yet, by the stars, the night was not yet on the wane.

She shifted herself in the saddle and turned to look upon the rider behind her. The same wild face that she had seen in the lightning flash looked back, so close to hers in the eerie glimmer that she started as if she would have dashed herself from the nag.

"Whither do you bring me?" cried my great-grandmother, "and what do you want with me? If it be money, take me back to my father or set me down that I may make my way home on foot, and I promise you that whatever ransom you ask, so it be within our means, it shall be honorably paid and no vengeance attempted for this night's work."

By which you will see that my great-grandmother was a canny lass and kept her wits about her.

But the fierce face, out of the dark masses of tangled hair, that seemed as strange and fearful to her as might some wild beast of the woods to a tender farm lamb, only flashed mocking white teeth upon her and the sinewy arms but held her closer. And the rider urged his steed, which seemed as unkempt, as sturdy, as squat as himself, once again into a trot which shook the breath out of her body. Then a fury rose and broke within her like a storm. She fell upon him first with stinging words,

then with buffets and hair-wrenchings, with pinchings and scratchings. He bore it all as if he had been insensible alike to insult or injury. But after a while, as her passion gave way to weariness and shame, he suddenly reined in, and disengaging one hand carelessly wiped the blood from his face.

"Now hark ye, lassie," said he, and he spoke English to her fluently enough, though with some care, as if it did not come ready to his tongue, "rave and scrawb as much as ye like, 'twon't avail ye much, and 'twon't hurt me much. But it is as well ye suld ken what is in my mind about ye. When we came to the farm, the lads and I, the bit kine was all we wanted—and ye maun say that it is but fair we should have our turn with a fat heifer now and again, for a Highland man must live as well as his Lowland neighbour. But even as the puir beasties were being driven off as doucely (they were skeered by the storm, puir things!) as if they were going to pasture, the deil took me to look in at the window. Then I saw ye sitting, with the fire playing on your bonny hair and on the bend of your waist. And I thought within myself—'twas as if the lightning had set fire to a dry rick—'That is the wife for Donald MacBane!' And so, my bonny dou, I am not for taking ye back to your father or setting ye on your legs to rin hame to him. But 'tis the

kind gudeman I'll make ye," said he, "and once we are wed, nane will do us harm. And if ye have the maist siller, 'tis I have the maist luve, and siller never hurt naught."

Whereupon, my great-grandmother said she gave the most terrible skreek ever was heard. So shrill it rang that it frightened even herself, and the little horse stopped as if it had been shot, and the birds in the low whin bushes all about rose complaining from their sleep and flapped circling round their heads.

And then on they trotted again, and she remembered no more, till they halted in a waste, yet wilder than the first. The dawn was breaking white and dreary upon a lowering sky.

"Now," said Donald MacBane, "we will have a spell of sleep, for 'tis full weary I am, and a man maun sleep, be he in luve, in war, or in business."

He jumped from the pony as he spoke, and lifted her down. The grasp of his lean hands was as terrible, my great-grandmother thought, and as strong as ever. And as he lifted her, she, being stiff and trembling, fell into his arms, for she could not hold herself; and he kissed her as he caught her. She had just the power left to clout him for it, whereat he laughed till the whole moor rang. Then twist-

ing the nag's rein round his right arm, he spread half the plaid and flung himself upon it.

"And the other half is for ye," he said, smiling with all his wicked face.

"Oh!" cried my great-grandmother, and would have struck him again, had she had the energy to lift her arm.

"Have it as ye wull," says he. "Ye maun gang your ain gait a wheen bit longer, and then it's my douce little wife ye'll be. Rin awa if ye like," says he, "for ye are bound to win back to me. Ye do not ken the moor, so ye will just go in a circle as round as a wedding-ring. May be t'will amuse ye!"

And so saying he rolled over in the plaid, and in another minute he was snoring. And the pony began cropping at the poor grass, and my great-grandmother felt abandoned by God and man.

At first she thought to make off on the pony, but it was as cunning as its master, and let out with its heels at her if she so much as came within a yard of it. And then she tried, though in truth her limbs could scarce bear her, to start away alone by herself over the desolate moor, but sure enough, when she had gone but a little way she found herself (and she never could explain why) rounding back again to where the Highlandman slept beside the cropping pony. And so, in despair, she

flung herself upon the turf, and before she knew it she too was asleep.

In her sleep she dreamed a wild and fretted dream, And presently, out of the turmoil of it, she thought that she was by the ingle-nook and John Haseltine beside her, and that John kissed her; but not as he had kissed her that night (and even in her dream she remembered this in grudge against him), with a cool, brotherly touch. These were kisses of love; passionate, masterful, fiery. And as he kissed her, he crooned to her: "My bonnie, bonnie bride!" And to the fire of love in the words and in the kisses her heart leapt.

Now as her heart leapt she woke up, and there was the blank morning sky above her and the wide, wide moor around her, and beside her sat the squatting Highlandman. He was gazing upon her with a flame in his eyes.

"My bonnie bride!" said he; and thus she knew whose were the kisses that yet lay so hot upon her lips.

I have made it clear, I think, that my great-grandmother was a quick-tempered lass; but never, so she told my grandmother, had she known such a frenzy of anger in her life before or since as that which now took her. She sprang to her feet and scrubbed her mouth as if she would have laid her lips raw.

"Your bride!" said she, and had to laugh, or she would have screamed. "Not so long as there is a knife in the whole of Scotland." And indeed, if she had had a knife to her hand, she felt it in her then to have driven it to his heart.

"Canny!" said he, smiling at her. "Never boast, hinny! No ain of us can tell in the morn what the day may bring forth. See yon sun?" said he, stretching out his haggard arm and pointing to the horizon where the sun still hung low, but very beautiful and dazzling, with rays all round it piercing the clouds, as you may see it pictured in the old Bible. "Who knows," said he, "but what before yon sun has travelled half its course to-day, it may shine upon us, man and wife!"

He grinned in her face as he spoke; his teeth were very white and strong, as she had noticed before. She set her lips and turned her head away. She felt she hated him the more for the savage beauty of his countenance, and beautiful it was, though marred by her nails that night. So she let him lead her once more to the pony and set her on it, after the fashion she had by this time grown wofully accustomed to, and she never so much as asked him whither he was taking her, for indeed she was almost too weary to think at all. This much she knew, that she could not escape upon the

moor; and one faint hope she had of obtaining help if they should but win to some spot where she could appeal to a fellow human.

Thus they set forth once more to the jogging trot to which her every bone answered with sore greeting, and in a very little while her heart was cheered by the sight of a cultivated patch of field, the white gleam of the high road, the shelter of trees, and blue smoke rising against the threatening yellow sky. Yet 'twas but a wretched hamlet, and though the shanty at which they halted was of a slightly better quality than the four or five others clustering round it, that was very little to say, for it was a miserably poor place with volumes of turf smoke rushing out through a hole in the thatched roof and through the glassless window. There was a great dung heap before the door, about which a little herd of ragged children were playing, more dirty, she thought, than it was conceivable for any creature to become, and shrieking to each other in Gaelic. A dry bush hung above the half-open door, that was itself falling from its hinges, and by this she knew it was an inn.

Upon the arrival of the new-comers, the wild urchins ran squealing like a disturbed litter of piglets into the dark reeking of the hovel. At the same moment Donald MacBane dismounted and called. Out came a stunted, weather-

beaten woman with black elf-locks hanging about her face, who flung up her hands, as she caught sight of them, and poured forth a torrent of words in a tongue as uncouth, to great-grandmother's ears, and as intelligible to her as if it had been the language of beasts.

She sat still mute, therefore, clinging to the pony's rough mane, and indeed the dumb nag and the wild moor now seemed to her preferable to the unknown horror of that Highland cottage. In the track of the inn-woman presently followed a squat man, and after him an old hag, and then a slatternly slut of some sixteen years, and a couple of slouching black a'vised lads. Indeed, my great-grandmother said, they seemed to come pouring out upon her till it was a marvel to her how the wretched hut could contain so many. And they all shouted in the Gaelic at Donald MacBane, and he shouted back at them till the poor young woman felt her brain reel. And some faces expressed fear and some admiration, some a sort of envy, yet all a great surprise. All looked upon her as curiously as if she were a being from another world.

At length Donald MacBane came up to her, lifted her down and handed her over to the first woman, saying:

"Gae with her, hinny, she is a gude creature and she will give you water to lave your face

and a drink of milk to refresh ye, before we start again upon our journey. And as for me," he said, "I maun hae a drop of the usquebaugh, for the very soul of me is dry."

My great-grandmother turned to look at the woman and seemed truly to read a kind of womanly pity in that wild face. The thought of the clean water and the milk was pleasant to her, so she suffered the ragged wife to take her into the hovel, through the dim room, where the peat smoke scalded her eyes and caught at her throat, and on to a sort of back room or shed, open to the winds of heaven.

Here she fell upon a bench, and the woman brought her milk, hot from the cow, in a broken yellow cup. The milk was laced with spirits, and as she drank it ran warm through her trembling body, and braced her sinking courage. And then, by signs, she got her hostess to fetch her water in a pail, and she washed and washed till some of the horror of the night seemed to be washed from her.

Next she plucked out her high comb and shook down her chestnut hair. The Highland woman threw up her hands and cried aloud in admiration.

But even as my great-grandmother shook it out and drove the comb through it as well as she could, she saw through the ruddy veil how the woman's face changed suddenly to a dirty

grey, how she bent her ear to listen and how her smiling lips became convulsed as if in terror.

"What is it?" cried my great-grandmother, forgetting that the poor creature could not understand a word. But the woman lifted up her hand as one who bids her be silent and listen, and then was heard a regular tramping and a jingle, jingle, jingle, as of mounted soldiers without. There came a sharp word of command that rang upon the air like a pistol shot, and then the tramping ceased and there was no sound but the snort of a horse and the ring of a bit or the stamp of an impatient hoof. Upon this there rose a storm of Gaelic within the shanty which was as suddenly hushed, and all at once my great-grandmother found Donald MacBane standing at her elbow.

His breath came a little short, and his cheek too was curiously faded beneath its deep tan; but his eyes looked at her as a hawk's upon its prey.

"Now, hinny," said he, "if ye want to see me hangit ye have got but to say the word! The soldiers are without," said he, "seeking you and me."

"God be praised!" cried my great-grandmother, flinging back her hair and clasping her hands in joy. And then, "God forbid," she said, "I don't want you to hang."

He had made a gesture to simulate the twisting of a rope round his neck, and flung his head on one side with his tongue out and a horrible suggestion of a thrawn neck. She lifted her hands to shut out the horrid sight.

Just then, from the other room, there broke forth afresh a screech of Gaelic like a whole pondful of geese and fowl disturbed, and above all the ring of the clean English voice. She pointed to the wide moor beyond the yard.

"Away with you!" said she, in a breathless whisper. He smiled back at her and pointed too; she saw the bayonet of a dragoon rise above the little hedge even as she looked, and another a few feet beyond; and she knew the place was ringed.

"Nay," said he, "I maun hang. Ye shall see me hang, lassie.'

Now my great-grandmother always said that if he had shown the smallest cowardice, she thinks she would have indeed found it in her heart to let him go to his death. But though he stood so close to her that his shoulder touched her, there was not a quiver in his frame, not a flicker in the lid of the eye that fixed her with its keen, far-away, indomitable look. And yet she knew he did not want to die because his cheek had become so bloodless that the scratches she had given him now stood out in fiery lines.

"Whatever happens," thought she to herself, "that is a man." And then she made up her mind. "I will not have you hang," she said.

He flushed suddenly.

"Say as I bid ye," he said, "and ye can save me yet."

"And if I do," says she, hanging back as he would have led her forward into the outer room, in which the noise was rising and sinking like the wind in a night of storm, "if I do, will ye set me free?"

"I give ye my aith," said he, "that, an ye will not wed me of ye ain will, I will bring ye back to your father!"

"Do you swear?" said she.

He did so. It was an oath so fearful that it made her blood run cold. Then he snapped the shawl from the woman's shoulders and flung it over my great-grandmother's head; and drew the brass wedding-ring from her hand and slipped it on my great-grandmother's finger.

"Now follow me," said he, and marched into the guest-room with as bold a step as if he were lord of the land. Peeping through the shawl, my great-grandmother followed him and saw how the dark hovel was full of heavy-booted dragoons, and how the chief of them, an officer with a keen English face and fine powdered hair, sat at a table, with the wild

Highland people drawn up before him, penned round by soldiers, as if they had been so many wild beasts.

The dragoon captain wheeled round upon his stool and looked at the new-comers with eager blue eyes.

"Ha!" said he, "whom have we here?"

MacBane advanced, saluted; and, in his glib yet studied English, explained at some length that he was a Highland drover returning from the fair at Kinross with his new Lowland bride.

"Ha!" said the Captain again, "come forward, young woman. Take off that shawl."

Margaret Haseltine obeyed. There was a murmur among the men at sight of that golden head in so dark and evil a place.

The Sergeant and the Captain whispered together.

"It is damnably like the description," said the Captain. "Hark, you rascal," said he to the pretended drover, "your story is plausible enough, but that countenance of yours bears vastly different evidence. I verily believe," said the Captain, "that you are none other than the scoundrel I am in search of, and that there stands Miss Haseltine, the young woman for whom we have ridden since dawn."

Upon this the Sergeant clapped Donald MacBane upon the shoulder, and there was a sinister clink of handcuffs.

"Do not be afraid, Miss," said the Captain gently to my great-grandmother, "you are quite safe, and none can do you harm." And then he added, laughing, "And you have marked that gentleman's face in a way that is like to carry him to the gallows."

"Bide a wee, bide a wee," said Donald, as cool as a cucumber. "Let my gude wife speak for herself. Do not be in too great a hurry, Captain. Mak sure ye've got the right bird before you clap the cage door. Hinny," said he, turning to Margaret, "tell these gentlemen that I have spoken the truth and that you are my wife."

Now my great-grandmother found herself answering before she knew what she was doing; and what she said was this:

"I am."

"What?" cried the Captain, in great surprise, "is this man your husband, mistress?"

My great-grandmother looked round upon them all, and then at Donald MacBane; and upon his unflinching eyes (yellow they were, with black pupils that expanded and contracted as they watched her) her wondering eyes rested.

Then she said as one may speak in sleep:

"He is my husband."

"And she is my wife," said Donald MacBane, promptly, and took up her hand to show

the wedding-ring. "And as for the scratches," said he, smiling slyly, "well, your Honour is not a married man, or he'd not make so muckle account of them."

The soldiers tittered and nudged each other, but the Captain looked stern. Donald MacBane thereupon made his bow, and my great grandmother thought it was strange to see the ease and grace of him, cateran though he was; then he took her by the arm and drew her back with him to the shed and no one sought to stay them.

But ere she turned Margaret Haseltine saw the Captain's blue eyes shoot clear contempt upon her, and her pride smarted her sorely that even for an hour she should pass for the bride of the Herd-Widdiefow.

She could not have said what sharp conflict was in her heart when she heard, by the running of the soldiers at their Captain's order and the trampling of the horses once again, by the musical jingle of spur and bit, and the clank of a flying scabbard, that the little troop were riding away across the moor.

She flung the dirty screen from her head, twisted her hair into a decent knot, and called fiercely upon the reiver, who from the open shed was watching the last bobbing, vanishing red coat.

"Now," said she, "I've kept my word, see that you keep yours."

He wheeled about and gave her a long look.

Just then from the inner room there burst a sound of shouting and hand-clapping and a shrill crow of woman's laughter. It was like the freeing of mighty waters.

"Take me out of this!" said my great-grandmother, and stamped her foot.

Donald MacBane answered by no word, but took her hand and led her forth once more. Under his glance the clamorous crew fell quiet, and drew back, and whispered together, eyeing her more curiously than before.

She handed the hostess back her wedding-ring, sore vexed that she had naught to give her for her civility but a word of thanks in a strange tongue. As the poor creature took the trinket, if ever woman (so my great-grandmother thought), from her own sore knowledge of life, took pity upon a sister, that woman took pity upon her; so much so that at sight of her face a cold sweat started upon her own brow.

A ragged urchin was holding a fresh pony in readiness for them, and the plaid that had acted so important a part in the night's work was now neatly folded across its withers, forming a not too uncomfortable pillion. The Highlander mounted and she was hauled up into her place.

That he should let her ride as a lady, behind,

instead of as a prisoner, before him, seemed in itself an earnest of his good intentions. And yet, as they left the wretched hamlet behind them, and as the shouts and the laughter that had broken out in valedictory greeting died away in the brisk heather-scented air, she hung her head and wondered what dull oppression lay upon her spirits.

They ambled for a while in silence down the road which inclined between two stretches of moorland toward a distant and apparently cultivated valley. The sky had brightened into clear blue, and the autumn tints upon whinbush and bracken and heather were glorious to see.

"How soon shall we be home?" said my great-grandmother.

"Hame, is it?" said Donald MacBane.

"May be a twa-three hours."

He turned the pony from the highroad as he spoke, and took a sort of sheep track that seemed to lead indefinitely across the moor.

"Is this a short cut?" said she.

"Aye," Donald MacBane replied.

On they went again, when the silence and the stillness and the strangeness began to revive her apprehensions; she looked about her in the hope of descrying a familiar landmark. But 'twas the most desolate, god-forsaken waste one could imagine.

"I do not recognize this place," she exclaimed suddenly.

Donald MacBane made no reply. Struck to the heart, all at once, she gave a great cry:

"Fool, fool that I was to put trust in the faith of a Highlandman!"

He drew rein and turned to look at her over his shoulder, for the first time since they had started.

"And what did I promise ye, hinnie?" said he.

"To bring me home to my father, if I saved your neck, you false loon!" she cried, and made as bold a front as she could with so fearful and throbbing a heart.

"Whisht, whisht," said he, "I made nae sic promise. I promised to bring ye to your father an ye would not wed me of your ain free will."

"Where are you taking me to, in the name of God?" she cried wildly.

He looked back at her over his shoulder again, and the pony stood still and took to cropping the turf under his loose hand.

"I am taking ye hame," said he, with a dreadful smile of triumph. "Where else maun a man take his bride upon his wedding day? Hame, hinnie, hame to your gude man's house!"

She flung herself off the pony as if she had been sitting behind the devil; yet so possessed

by terror was she that then she stood still staring at him, and could not find breath to ask the meaning of his words.

Donald MacBane leisurely twisted round in the saddle and brought one lean bare leg to join its fellow. He sat sideways on the pony, and looked at her as if amused, yet with that singular steadiness of eye which had already reminded her of a striking hawk's.

"Have ye not claimed me as yer husband before witnesses?" said he, "before as gude witnesses as ever man or maid could wish? And have I not claimed ye? Does that not bind us as fast as kirk or book? Do ye not ken the law of Scotland?"

Then the whole truth flashed upon my unfortunate great-grandmother's mind. She saw how, out of his very death peril, the wild Highland thief had laid a trap for her, and how in her womanly pity she had fallen into it.

She felt her heart stop and then bound as if it would break. And the worst of all the agony within her was a kind of dreadful joy she felt within herself, to kill which she could have killed herself. And, being but a poor young lassie, when all was said and done, her courage suddenly failed her; she cast herself down on the turf, and for the first time in all this dreadful night and day, burst into a passion of tears.

Through her sobs and long-drawn breaths and over the hammering of her pulses she could hear the crisp sound of the pony's cropping teeth and his snorting breath as he nipped the grass in a circle about her. When she looked up at last it was to find Donald MacBane squatting on the turf beside her, watching her as he had watched her sleep that morning.

"Wha kens but that, if you will," said he, as their eyes met, "ye may hae the chance of seeing me hangit yet! So dinna greet so sair. There's naught so bad as can't be mended." Then he edged a little closer to her and stretched out that strong arm the grasp of which she knew so well.

"Natheless, being wed," said he, "ye canna rid yourself of my being, woman, unless by death. Sic is the law, and the law's a terrible thing!" He pressed her waist as he spoke. "*What's your name, my bonnie wife?*"

"Margaret," she sobbed.

"Buss me, Margaret!" said he. He drew her head to his shoulder gently and kissed her.

"Now," said he, "we are man and wife, and ye maun to my hame before I go to yours."

When my great-grandmother returned from the mountain fastness to her old home, there was at first great rejoicing because she had

been mourned as dead; and then the great dole because of the savage mate she had brought with her; and old Haseltine was all for having him given up to justice for his crime; and young Haseltine swore he would stand beneath the gallows and see him safe hanged before wedding the widow. But Margaret would have none of this. He was her husband, she told them briefly, and as such she must put up with him. Whereupon her father took to his bed, and young Haseltine left the farm in dire enmity with his fair cousin. But indeed, as my grandmother told me, although her mother had returned in evil plight enough and bore upon her face the stamp of much suffering, never was she heard to regret her first lover or to bewail her present master.

Yet my great-grandfather, Donald MacBane that is, made but an ill ruler of the farm, and was always skirmishing off to his wild companions or engaged upon some mad plot or expedition. In spite of these restless ways, 'twas said that he loved my great-grandmother fiercely to the end of his life. She bore him a whole house-full of swarthy, gypsy-looking lads and lassies; and when he died—and such as he do not die in their beds—she wore black for him till her time came to lie beside him once again.

And thus it comes that I who speak to you

have a pair of eyes like a hawk's under my great-grandmother's chestnut curls; and that, though (left heiress to the farm, even as she was before me) I wedded back into the old stock, the babe that lies in yonder cradle has a black skin and a frowning brow, and I know that the blood of the Herd-Widdiefow will run strong in our veins so long as Haseltine reigns at Haselburn.

ENDYMION IN BARRACKS

Endymion in Barracks

A smile was on his countenance; he seem'd,
To common lookers-on, like one who dream'd
Of idleness in groves Elysian:
But there were some who feelingly could scan
A lurking trouble in his nether lip,
And see that oftentimes the reins would slip
Through his forgotten hands: then they would sigh
And think of yellow leaves, of owlet's cry,
Of logs piled solemnly. Ah, well-a-day,
Why should our young Endymion pine away!

—*Keats.*

The marked influence of some kinds of hallucinations on the course of mental life in the otherwise perfectly sane, is matter not only of tradition but of tested history. One needs hardly hark back as far as the well-known "Demon" of Socrates: the "voices" that ran in Joan of Arc's brain had persuasion enough to change in radical manner the current of her existence. Less generally known, but striking enough, was that ghostly companion with the compelling whisper that dogged Descartes' steps in his own world of profound thought. Malebranche also had his soul-directing visions. So had Torquato Tasso. In these and many other well authen-

ticated instances of phantasm the influence of the brain-born "familiar," whether upon ignorant village-maid or on scholar-poet, or again on analytical, deep-dredging philosopher, proved potent and far-reaching.

How many more cases (had we but the records of such hauntings in the lives of thousands of brain-workers unknown to biography) could be adduced to illustrate this theme, no one can tell, of course. But it appears that Marshfield has been able to observe at least one modern instance.

The case of Edward Dalrymple, examined in the light of what one knows of the history of such visions, is not unique; but it must be of rare nature, for even Marshfield, ingenious ferreter of human documents as he is, has not been able to find anything akin to it in the modern records of specialists.

One evening, in Piccadilly, it seems he met this Dalrymple, a college friend of old, who, after many years, had but lately returned from India with his regiment. The young soldier was passing through the shaft of light thrown by the brilliant portals of Walsingham House, and, to use Marshfield's own pedantic language, it was interesting to notice the look of genuine pleasure that came into his wide-open grey eyes as he recognised his comrade of other days.

"Marshfield! by all that is good!" he exclaimed cheerily. And Marshfield the Observer was immediately annexed for that evening. They must dine together, at the Pig and Whistle, first of all—("Beg pardon, the Naval and Military Club, I mean," laughed Dalrymple, with unnecessary explanation. "We're having a regular beano, some fellows of ours, together to-night.") After dinner they would be able to talk over old times. Talk over old times . . . That sweetest of all communing for those whose ways have long been widely sundered!

In this wise Marshfield, as supernumerary, was made to take part in a remarkable entertainment—a most welcome event to one like him, ever on the look-out for novel impressions. Two rapid hours were spent amid the best joviality of subalterns on short leave, keen for a little dissipation after a long turn of foreign service.

And a refreshing experience it was for the saturnine observer, steeped in the gravity of solitary town habits, to see round a table none but young, healthy, weather-burnt countenances; to mark the cross fire of so many pairs of merry eyes—guiltless enough at all times of any complicated speculation, but vigorous, and well open to the simpler enjoyment of life; to hearken to the obvious but hearty jokelet; to the post-prandial witticism,

bounding forth before exuberance of spirits as the cork flies before champagne foam; to the stingless irony and anodyne personality bandied between brethren in arms who had been in more than one "tight place" together during the last few years.

All this was as fresh fields and pastures new to the inveterate note-taker; a sort of blood-transfusion into the veins of a man whose heart never seemed to beat from any personal impulse; whose merely receptive soul never originated any personal enthusiasm or subjective emotion.

Unconsciously affectionate pride gilded every allusion of the young men to their Corps, in their converse with "the underdone literary Johnny, Dalrymple's pal"—as they designated their chance guest—unconscious that they themselves were in his eyes little more than interesting presentments of psychological phenomena. Civilised youths (Marshfield docketted them), who had, every one of them, fleshed his blade, rushed through the clamour, chaos and execrations of carnage, dealt with Death and grinned in his face, and yet thought no more of it all afterwards than did their long-haired, naked, pagan forbears. Great in its way was Marshfield's appreciation under his pale, reluctant smile.

If these, he thought, were average samples,

there was nought but the happiest opinion to be formed of the brotherhood in which Fortune had cast Dalrymple's lot—all the happier for the high popularity that enigmatical fellow appeared to enjoy among them.

"Oh—Dalrymple? *He* is our show man, you know," had a neighbour whispered to Marshfield.

. . . . . .

Every step of that evening was as a whet to the Observer's elemental curiosity; for, as a matter of fact, the Army was the very last place where he would have expected the man he had known as "Dalrymple of Trinity," to find a congenial abode.

The Dalrymple he remembered was essentially a college-bred man—and, moreover, a creature specially equipped, both by nature and self-training, for the higher transcendent flights of purely intellectual life—that rarefied life with all its artistic sensitiveness, its practical uselessness, its few but subtle joys and its general misery. And here, facing him now, was a placid, good-humoured young Briton, typical of that rude-health, common-sense kind of manhood which most helps to keep an empire together.

Since they had parted company in the old days of Trinity, great indeed had been Marshfield's desire to see for himself how this fas-

tidious exquisite fared in the atmosphere of martial life generally, and, particularly, in the close one of a smart regimental mess. For Marshfield, who knows most things, knew that the most disqualifying offence (short of ungentlemanly conduct) that can be committed by a subaltern, is any attempt at "intellectual" converse—a form of "side" too pestilent for words!

From the little he had already seen, however, it was evident that if ever a man appeared to have taken to his proper element, it was Edward Dalrymple. His bronzed face had settled into the typical countenance of the British officer. There was the energetic set of eyes and mouth; the look of calm, unobtrusive self-reliance; the reticence to any emotional display save that of merriment or contempt for the "outsider" or the "nigger." His very tone of voice, every shred of his phraseology, were so strictly tuned to the accepted pitch of his class that they seemed positively natural. Indeed, although Marshfield had recognised him at first glance by his clean-cut features and by something unmistakable in his carriage, on closer observation he could now hardly recall one single element of the original Dalrymple — whose name was still a byword in the University—Dalrymple the high-strung esthete, whom even the "Deuced Superior

Set" used at times to consider, in perplexed dismay, as perhaps a trifle of a shade too exclusive in his artistic culture.

Physically, the man who had been noted for a somewhat fragile perfection of build suggestive of a decadent Greek type, and for a temperament best described as "a bundle of nerves," was now square and solid even to a promise of future stoutness. The only thing that had not changed was a peculiar sweetness in the smile, which was as striking on his now essentially vigorous as it had been on his whilom nervously sensitive, rather worn, countenance.

Intellectually he seemed to have sunk wholly into that elementary scepticism of appreciation; that preference for the obvious in ideas; that level disdain of mere sentiment; that habit of mind, in short, which, in combination with clean athletic tastes and a reverence for the sacred character of Sport, is all-sufficient (but all-necessary) for the achievement of popularity in the military world.

What had happened? pondered Marshfield. Truly here was a vein of observation to be followed up. A rich one.

The classical scholar, the poetic prizeman, the lover of Tibullus and Ovid, the worshipper of sensuous music, the intense dreamer who in other days would express his ideals in lines

of Keats, Swinburne or Rossetti—this same creature now displayed a seemingly appreciative acquaintance with the latest wit of the *Pink 'Un;* and on every forcible occasion quoted an apposite modern instance in the careers of Jorrocks or Soapy Sponge—Prodigious!

Marshfield, at bottom, was not quite convinced of the integrality of the metamorphosis. Thus the breaking up in due time of that jovial party was on the whole welcome: he longed for a little more private intercourse.

When the other men had departed, the old fellow-students remained behind and lounged and conversed for a while in a desultory way over the cigars.

Now, when Marshfield is on his observing path, he handles, as we all know, the leading thread of conversation with great skill. But never, even during this second stage, could he elicit anything from his friend which did not tally with the first impression. Yes . . . of a verity, he reluctantly admitted, there was a creature in perfect peace of mind, in possession of that placidity which in a young man can only co-exist (so Marshfield diagnosed) with a total absence of ideals. Everything on that tranquil face, in those clear eyes behind which perpetually lurked a merry twinkle, proclaimed that Life was very good.

Indeed, at every drift, the man's talk justified the proclamation: Nothing better than the time he had had these few years: The regiment was the best of earthly homes (besides being the most superb corps conceivable): No existence could possibly be half so full of excellence as that of a soldier of the Empire —the hardships of active service, past or prospective, were in themselves the noblest incentive to self-esteem, for they gave dignity to the leisure of peace-times. . . . (At this point Marshfield pricked his ears: there was a touch of the old speculative Dalrymple in that distinction): Between Duty well executed and the heads of Sport, so many and so pleasant and withal so exacting, there was evidently no time for unprofitable aspiration.

Such, as to colour, was Dalrymple's autobiographical account. It was delivered with eyes ever smiling when they met the Observer's searching glance, in contented tones; and with that studiously restricted vocabulary of the mess-room, that preference for vague jargon words which is the best safeguard against the capital error of "talking too clever."

Still Marshfield was not satisfied. He had not known Dalrymple so long in the character of "Jeune Féroce" to accept implicitly this new personation of inarticulate subaltern.

In this unsatisfying manner the hour of the

last train to Chatham drew near. Dalrymple rose, and eyed his old friend with a quizzical look—as if he guessed well enough his perplexed frame of mind.

"If you have nothing better to do," he suggested in his genial way, "come down with me to Chatham. I can give you a shake-down tonight, and instal you more comfortably tomorrow."

Marshfield closed greedily with the offer, and, having passed by his chambers to take up the occasional portmanteau, found himself for the next hour whirling along the most bone-shaking line in England. During the best part of that time he pursued, but without better success in front of that quiet contented face, his veiled course of cross-examination. Not one single allusion, however, to the frame of mind that had prevailed in the days of old was to be elicited from Dalrymple, who serenely eluded all suggestions, direct or indirect.

The obstinate stand-off began to try Marshfield's patience not a little.

"Look here, Edward Dalrymple, Sir," he said at last, irritated by the smile of his antagonist—a smile so obviously fraught with wilful unconsciousness—"this is becoming ridiculous in the extreme! Your masquerading in a new character is all very well, especially as the

character is so excellent and fits you so nicely —yes, I am bound to admit that it does agree with your face and shoulders—but between you and me, my friend, it *is* masquerade! I take it you have not lost *all* memory. What I want to know, what I mean to know, is, *how* you have managed to cast off the old self to make room for the new. The two cannot co-exist. You understand perfectly well what I mean."

Dalrymple continued to smile at his cigar, with the air of one who mentally says: "Ah, I was waiting for you there." But when he looked up he merely said, carelessly:

"Yes, yes, you mean all that tommy-rot we used to talk at the 'Varsity. Lord, what high falutin we did go in for!"

And Marshfield found out that frontal attack was as futile as side manœuvring.

"You renegade!" cried he, with forced tragic accent, and gave up the siege. But he felt annoyed, more annoyed indeed than the case justified.

On his side Dalrymple seemed now struck into a musing spell. For the rest of the journey the two remained silent, gazing reflectively at each other under the twinkle of the roof-lamp.

Nor did the conversation revive when they sallied forth into the darkness outside Chatham Station. There was no fly in attendance; it

was a keen frosty night, clear and star-bespangled to the utmost glory. In silence, covering their heads and shoulders with the same rug, for the breeze, slight as it blew, was nipping to ears and nape, they tramped up the steep slopes towards the Barracks. Not a word was pronounced, save when Dalrymple, in his clear ringing voice, answered with the Shibboleth, "*Friends!*" the challenging, "*Halt, who goes there?*" of the various sentries they passed from time to time.

Chatham Barracks have now been pulled down and replaced by modern improvements. In those days the officers' quarters were aligned, a long row of ricketty houses, on an elm-grown terrace overlooking the parade ground; they wore, especially in dusky light, a picturesque look, of the kind more usually associated with old world alms-houses than with military buildings. There was, in fact, something almost collegiate, Inn-of-Courts like, about the wooden stairs, winding and crazy, about the low-ceiled, panelled rooms, the uneven board flooring, the diamond paned windows, the queer old fire grates, adorned with the monogram of *Georgius Tertius Rex* and canting arms of the Ordnance Store Department which had supplied these wasteful contrivances.

In one of these still glowed darkly an enormous stack of the Government's bituminous slate. Dalrymple, who on coming into the warmer atmosphere of his own ground seemed to have recovered all his gaiety, announced his purpose of devoting this chamber to his guest's comfort for the night. He addressed himself vigorously to the task of poking the coals into a blaze, heating water for a night-cap (stiff and strong) and ministering general hospitality in the best style of soldier-like geniality.

Then, with a last look round and a parting smile at the Observer from the doorway, which he filled almost entirely, he announced his intention "to go and roost next door."

Marshfield was so desirous of inspecting in greater detail the modern dwelling of this perplexing fellow—for a bachelor's room, he held, is full of revelation concerning his true inwardness—that he never even thought of deprecating, however feebly, the surrender by his host of what was in all probability the only decent quarter available just then. No sooner was he alone than he began his "journey round my room."

Of course the most immediately attractive points of interest on such a journey are the book-cases. Within limits, they stand as an implied confession of personal tastes and drift of mind. Here, however, indications again

failed to show any variance from what Marshfield persisted in regarding as a mere pretence of character in his friend. The array of printed matter, goodly enough for one of no fixed abode, displayed only the thin red line of military "Manuals" of drill and encampment; of musketry, signalling, fieldworks, military law at large with special conspectus of courts-martial; of range-finding and meat-inspection, with now and then a more bulky tome on fortification, administration, operations of war and applied tactics—all stuff to the same purpose, as the Observer noted with unabating scepticism.

He looked for a Bible, suddenly recollecting how Dalrymple had been wont to quote with enthusiasm from the "Song of Songs" and the Psalms; how he had revelled in all that glowing imagery of old-world Eastern thought, rendered into noblest English: . . . he found only the *regulation* New Testament, bound in oilcloth.

On the walls neither picture nor print; on the mantelpiece, not even the photograph of some "girl at home," "fashionable beauty," dancer or favourite actress—those all but inevitable adornments of the subaltern's quarters.

Two ordnance maps (much pointed) of the Northwest Frontier, and of Burmah; another

of Kent (on a large, hunting scale), afforded the only relief to the bareness of the panels. As for the rest of the movables, limited to the strict necessary, it was of the most cunning camp-furniture order.

Not the habitat of the over-imaginative, concluded Marshfield, more and more interested. The only symptom which might, in accordance with the modern doctrine of degeneracy, indicate a step away from barbarian simplicity, was the studious symmetry, the precision of neatness, which prevailed in the room. Swords and belts, revolvers, field-glasses, single-sticks, canes, hunting crops, polo-clubs, gun case and bandoliers, a couple of pig-sticking lances, were arranged with a luxury of smartness which made Marshfield pause in his puzzled contemplation. The shadow of a smile crept at length on his lips.

"It almost points to the mental weakness of the Total Abstainer. . . . An odd case," he mused, as he prepared at last to retire into the truckle bed, hard and narrow—a couch by no means suggestive of that "Throne of Dreams," about which the Dalrymple of old had so often waxed dithyrambic. "I am glad I have seen it."

. . . . . .

Sound or prolonged sleep is not a thing to which the unaccustomed visitor in Barracks

can look forward. Marshfield was awakened by reveille. And being kept awake by the increasing turmoil; being moreover not particularly warm or comfortable on his succinct couch, he rose and dressed, all in the grey light of a frosty morning, and sallied forth for a brisk tramp.

When, an hour later, he returned to his quarters, mistaking the door on his landing, he found he had entered the room into which, with hospitable renunciation, Dalrymple had retired. It was a kind of servant's bunk, containing a barrack bedstead, a small company of treed boots on a shelf, a saddle or two, the morning tub and can, empty portmanteaux and regimentals on their stretchers.

Rolled up in sundry blankets, with a great-coat under his head, for the bed was unfitted, Dalrymple seemed profoundly asleep. Marshfield, having contemplated the scene for a moment, was about to retire quietly, when his attention was aroused by the singular expression on the sleeper's face.

The young man was lying on his back; the head was thrown up in a striking attitude; one hand was under the nape of the neck and the other rested on the forehead, palm upwards. This position of the arms higher than the shoulders is one preliminary to the waking change after deep slumber—as Marshfield

knew, who was the learned in many such unconsidered facts. That alone might have tempted him to pursue a short physiognomical study from his point of vantage; for nothing is sacred to the Observer. But what riveted his interest for the moment was the ecstatic drawing of the man's features.

The winter sun, darting in a clear blue sky over the crest of Chatham lines, had just begun to peer into the little room. A pale gold shaft of light was even then moving across the sleeper's face. Now, under its caress, the lips grew tremulous; the nostrils quivered for an instant; the lids became lengthened under raised brows, and all of a sudden they were filled with tears, which presently streamed on his cheek. Then, with a great sigh, the sleeper awoke; there came a certain rigidity over his frame, and the hurried rhythm of his breath ceased. But for some time he made no movement.

After a while, however, he sat bolt upright, opened his eyes and gazed into space. What he still saw before him was evidently marvellous; never had Marshfield seen on human face an expression of such overpowering wonder, such ecstatic joy!

He, too, held his breath and watched, and for a long while silence filled the room. Presently, however, heavy steps resounded on the

stairs, and a soldier-servant, laden with hot-water cans, pushed the door open with his foot. The dreamer's spell was broken. Dalrymple started, turned his head, and perceived his friend's presence.

"Ah, Marshfield," he said, with the effort of one whose brain action is divided. There was an instinctive attempt at cheeriness, but the voice was toneless. "Up before me? . . . Good man! . . . Cold? . . . Go down to the Mess, there'll be a fire. . . . The fellows'll look after you. . . . I'll be round in a jiffy."

Even as he spoke with spasmodic joviality, the absent, dazed expression had not left his face. Marshfield left him standing upright, and still wistfully contemplating his inner thought.

. . . . . .

The duty that devolved that morning on Dalrymple was the command of the Convict Picket.

This is the most unpleasant day's work that falls to the lot of every subaltern in the garrison of Chatham. At nine o'clock the officer detailed marches his party, served with ball cartridge, to the guard-house at the Prison Gate. There, until nightfall (when the army of felons is once more returned to its cells and bolted in) he has to dwell, strapped and buckled, girded against all emergencies and

backed by the most explicit and draconian orders.

As a rule, however, the actual work is limited to the frequent visiting of sentries, the reiterated turning out of the guard on the approach of blue, drab or yellow parties of slaves, as they are marched out to daily toil, or back to midday food, or in again for the night's lock-up.

But for the officer in his dismal office next to the soldier's room the hours wearily drag their length. On this account, and although against regulations, the custom of the service tolerates the practice of harbouring visitors, so long as the Queen's Service is not allowed to suffer. Thus it was that the afternoon found Marshfield, expectant, scalpel in hand, so to speak, as "anatomiser of melancholy," in the company of his subject.

A change had come over Dalrymple, singular indeed by contrast to the buoyant serenity of the previous day.

He was as a man who has sustained a severe mental shock, whose natural system of thought is unhinged. That morning, in the messroom, over the hasty breakfast before marching off his picket, he had been silent, absent-minded; he had mused over his cup, which he left half full, and if he had eaten anything it had been mere mechanical nibbling—he had

seemed barely to hear what was said to him or around him, and had spoken at random. He had been, in fact, as one who listens to unheard voices, who gazes through stone walls at unseen vistas.

"Dalrymple seems chippy, poor chappy," genially remarked in the vernacular one young warrior to the guest. "Never seen him like this before. Generally crisp as celery in the morning. I *thought* he was too full of beans, when he went up yesterday. The little village seems to have knocked it out of him!"

And Marshfield had pondered.

And now, as they sat on wooden chairs one on each side of the fire, in the bare, ochre-washed cell, the same haunting spirit seemed to hang over the scarlet-tunicked, white-belted youth.

But, whereas, in the mess-room his impatience of talk around him, his unconscious dread of questions which might force him to speak himself, had been the main symptom observable, in the silent intimacy of the guard-house there seemed to rise in him a new desire, a yearning to speak, merely restrained by a sort of bashfulness; the bashfulness of surrender.

Marshfield was in his element, and handled the situation in his best manner. He sat still, seemingly immersed in the absolute enjoy-

ment of the best of cigars, but gazing at his friend with his cat-like look, to all appearance profoundly indifferent, yet alertly observant.

Over and over again did Dalrymple take the breath which, like the catch of a clock about to strike, portends coming speech, then closed his parting lips and remained dumb, staring musingly at the fiery bars of the hearth, or, with head thrown back, through the frost-framed windows into grey-blue space.

At last he began—no longer with the studied disjointedness, the slang of camp and mess, but with that cultured precision of wording and phrasing which had been one of the leading marks in the "Deuced Superior Set."

"Marshfield," he said, "I have that on my mind which must find voice . . . had I to tell it to the clouds, to the winds, to the rushes!"

Marshfield pricked up his ears, if possible, more attentively than before. Dalrymple had risen and was now pacing the narrow cell in some excitement. His steel scabbard clanked against the wall at each short turn.

"It is a wondrous coincidence that you should be near me to-day; for, certes, there is no one I know at present to whom I would tell what has happened to me. Coincidence? Indeed, it is to you I owe the delight, the revelation——"

He stopped a moment, with his fingers

lightly pressing his temples, plunged again into a sudden depth of wondering. "It is your doing, of course. Yes, you are the unconscious evoker—Did you not call out, Renegade! . . . Renegade? Ah, great Gods!"

For a moment something like a reflex of the ecstatic look that had transfigured the sleeping man that morning passed over his face. Marshfield, on his side, still silent, was the living image of expectant curiosity. His friend, from the midst of his dream, noted the expression and was once more brought back to the actual.

"Listen, Marshfield," he said, sitting down again and mechanically beginning to stir the fire. "I shall tell you. Yesterday you wanted to know; to-day you shall know. It is curious, and you are perhaps the only one who could understand such a posture of affairs. Moreover, it was undoubtedly brought about by your talk, by the siege you laid before my condemned thoughts. I *had* shut out a portion of my House of Life, as a man might cut off a haunted wing of his mansion, and you guessed it. I will tell you, while the impress is still fresh upon me. To-morrow it may have faded already. Yes, no doubt, to-morrow it will have faded."

This was said after a pause, on the wake of a light sigh. But he pulled himself together:

"You know," he pursued, "the sort of man I was in the old days."

This Marshfield knew indeed, and nodded with some impatience.

"But you don't know, perhaps, at what a pace that pride of mental self-indulgence was making for mental disgrace. I realised it one day; not a day too soon! And yet——"

He hesitated one moment, as though some unseen pressure at his elbow had cautioned him—Then:

"Reason prevailed in time," he went on, with an effort. "Free-will was still untouched. One morning, waking from some mad Olympian dream to the dreary imperfection of this every-day world, in despair I asked myself: Which was the real existence—the dream of my own special world, the dream that could make impressions so much more vivid than anything experienced in waking life, that could wring my soul, aye, stir my senses, to a pitch of exquisiteness inconceivable in the midst of waking reason? or the world of my neighbour man, which at almost every step disclosed some hideousness of pain, sorrow, ugliness; at almost every hour trammelled my yearning for perfection in delight and beauty with its Briarean arms of duty, impotence, reason, morals, pity and what not; that ever clutched at my imagination and pinned me to grimy

earth? that waking world that never allows any one more than a transient, flash-like revelation of the ideal—revelation born of some startling phrase in the unknown tongue of music, some mysteriously eloquent harmony of words in verse, some burst of colour, glorious beyond realisation or delicate beyond belief; some perfume swoon sweet, robbing one of all strength and will?"

Marshfield revelled in his case. Not more jubilantly could the detective watch the sudden unravelling by unforeseen confession, of a baffling tangle of mere surmises.

"I remember," said Dalrymple, "that critical morning. It was a miserable November day. Even our noble old college courts seemed trivial and dreary, ugly beyond the mending of hope. And when, with greater wakefulness, it forced itself upon me that this trivial world of ours was the real world after all, a sort of despair encompassed my soul. Then, oddly enough, a sudden reaction set in—Whence it came, I cannot tell, for I was far gone already in that mental hyperæsthesia which means the very emasculation of the soul. . . . Suddenly, as I said, the reaction came. A sort of terror stole over me; *that way lay madness!* Not only unfitness to fulfil man's part in this fighting world, but positive madness. This ever present shadow of feeble

melancholia, the futile yearning for the transcendental, the weak dread of all ugly impressions, the abject fear of painful sights. . . . An evil smell, a discordant noise—calamities! Mere coarseness of thought or speech, sufficient to cast a shadow of odiousness on the moment. What is it all, but madness? On the other hand, the mysterious note of a thrush saluting the sinking sun sufficing to hypnotise one into visions untranslatable, a strain of passionate melody to make you soar into visions of joy unrealisable, a glint of slanting sunrays in living verdure, a whisper of the breeze soughing among the branches, becoming a sort of mystic, elusive aphrodisiacs, that sets one musing upon loves of goddesses on Mount Latmos — madness again! Madness which made one look upon living women and the real world with disgust and contempt!"

During this curious confession Marshfield noted how the serene impassiveness that had baffled him so completely on the previous day, had now, like a mask, fallen away from his friend's countenance. Here was once more the face of the high-strung degenerate of old, the face on which every pulse of thought seemed to play as on a harp.

Dalrymple had paused, as if he found a difficulty in formulating his ideas.

"Well," he cried at last, "words—words in

prose, at least—are incompetent to record impressions so evanescent yet so haunting. Suffice it to say that I had a fright. What was to be done? I remember there were, at that time, two suicides whose story had come under my notice. One was that of an adoring disciple of Wagner, who, in despair of ever reaching the plane of the Master, of ever being able even to fathom to the full the endless suggestion of his music, poisoned himself, thus leaving behind him the misery of a hunt for the unattainable. . . . Leaving also the reputation of a madman, though I knew him to be as sane as I myself. *As sane as I—as I!* The other was that of an artist, quite obscure, yet a genius in his way, who spent his soul in reproducing, in thousands, sketches of a woman's head, all weird, demoniacal almost, but *no two alike!* Yet he said they were portraits of the same phantom! One morning he was found dead in his studio arm-chair. Charcoal was his remedy! On the stone floor was a pile of ashes: every sketch had been burned, and, with the smoke of the holocaust, his distracted soul had evaporated. Verdict: unsound mind! Now, I had not an idea of suicide. But, as I contemplated the endless dissatisfaction of this dual life, a great dread came over me. Was I also embarked upon that dismal current? What was to be done? Something had to be done if I

was not to drift into some such neurotic, hysterical decadent, dying of a rose, sobbing over a sunset; a bag of nervous selfishness, with perhaps opium or hasheesh in perspective to complete the degradation! Whether the fright was greater than the case justified I do not know, but a complete break seemed the only salvation. No compromise. Temperance would not do: it was a case of total abstinence! Now you begin to understand?"

"I see it as if I had been there," said Marshfield. "You have done it well, I must own," he added, not without a touch of admiration.

Indeed, it was a curious thing to listen to the square-shouldered, deep-chested Dalrymple, with his cropped soldier head, in his trim, tight scarlet and gold, portraying his past self in these terms of æstheticism.

"So, from one day to the other, the resolve was made. I burnt my poems, sold my books, locked my piano—nor has any one these eight years even suspected I could play aught but the vamping to a music-hall song. . . . Admit, Marshfield, this was strength of mind!" he added, looking up at his friend suddenly with something of a rueful gleam in his eyes. "There was just time to get through the Army examinations—Well . . . well, and here we are," he concluded, getting up. "And the oddest thing about it all is that, hard as the

wrench from the old vice was at first, and hard the new education—for it was like beginning life afresh—I have been perfectly happy. Peace of mind, you know, peace of mind. No self-communing, but one simple rule: duty. Or, in less high-sounding words: the day's work . . . and the custom of the service! You have no idea how fresh and strong that makes one feel. No groping, no yearning, no moodiness, no melancholia. Thankfulness for small mercies, that is, for small pleasure, and crude satisfaction in life, if shorn of transcendent joys: they are too dearly bought, 'twere better never to have had taste of them, for they seem to take unto themselves for their brief moments all the salt and scent of life, and leave the work-a-day world ashen to every sense."

Dalrymple remained a moment musing.

"The transcendent temperament," he resumed at last, sitting down again and looking thoughtfully into his friend's expectant eyes, "must really be a vice. It is like the relentless fiend, always keeping watchful siege on those who have once dallied with him, let them believe themselves never so secure; always ready to assail at the first unguarded moment. It is a veritable temptation of St. Anthony! The stout old Saint resisted, we are told. But then perhaps he had not so

many weak intellectual joints as the modern visionary, so many traitors in his citadel, so to speak. He resisted . . . and suffered. But he could not have suffered as we. And at least his temptation ended in relief, when the vision disappeared, whereas——"

"Whereas, with you, you love your temptation!" said Marshfield, who had hitherto prudently refrained from any comment, which might break the spell of revelation.

The athletic chest rose under a weary sigh.

"Aye, I fear I do!—I have had a relapse, most obviously. And what is worse, I feel that I would not, for a fortune, for anything I can think of, except my own self-esteem, that this strange, this marvellous vision had passed me by." His voice rose with suppressed enthusiasm. "Since it was that word of yours, cabalistic it would seem, that has evoked it, I shall even finish my confession. Phrases of accepted language are inadequate to describe; they can only suggest. We can paint in words something of horror and pain, and sorrow, because horror, pain and sorrow are always so near to our lives that words have associations with them. Whereas ideal beauty and unmixed, soul-ravishing joys are too far removed from life. You must interpret, interpret as the artist, as the poet does, by music, by symbolism, by allegory. You, I know, will not be

able to realise what happened to me this morning, you can only suspect. . . . But listen:

"Somewhere, in Time and Space, as I lay this morning, there came upon me, from amid the annihilation of deepest sleep, a consciousness of some new life-infused personality, fast unfolding, as one may see behind the blue sky line of a hill some dazzling white cloud rise and spread itself in splendour. It was an inexplicable feeling of glorious expectation. Then, I saw Her—the Vision, but more real," said the young man, without an inflection, and looking wistfully beyond, not at his friend, "more real than you."

"Ah, a woman!" said Marshfield, and his lips parted in their thin satirical smile.

"A woman, of course," repeated the other, unmoved, "for when we must symbolise the Beautiful, the most abstract, we must of necessity materialise it under lines of beauty, the most perfect in themselves, the most harmonious in their changes. Yet, though She stood before me, a symbol, it was a living woman. Instinct, indeed, with so much vitality that, as she looked at me with profound luminous eyes, she seemed to fill me with unbounded life and make my whole being attuned, as a bell, to the vibration of her voice.

"There was a sort of wistful joy on her face,

the shadow of a smile, a brilliancy of passion trembling upon realisation. When I say I *saw*, I might as aptly say I *felt* or I *heard*, for every fibre of me was responsive to her presence. '*Ah, Renegade*,' said she, and there came into the glance, under which I was encompassed as by a caressing mantle, an enchantment beyond words; it was a sort of mocking tenderness, under the joy of recovered love. 'I knew you would come back——' "

Dalrymple's voice, as he repeated these words, had changed, as if in his own manly tones he unconsciously sought to echo some distant impossible note.

" 'Ah, Well Beloved,' said she (She, the Great Joy of Man's Desire!—thus only can I attempt to describe her), and extended her arms. And as, slowly, irresistibly as Fate, she gathered me close to her, the touch of her shoulder was a thing to marvel at, smooth and fresh as polished marble yet pulsing and responsive to passionate blood. She smiled, and in the transient gleam of her teeth between lips of living rose, in the proud flash of her eye —green-brown, like a gleam of sun through a forest in June—all the glory of the world's colour burst before my vision. With a laugh that was like the joyous ripple of a brook, she swayed in my arms as the sapling sways in the breeze, and her hair, Aphrodite's own mane,

fell like a golden cataract over me, filling the air with the fragrance of Paradise—the breath of the red rose in its pride, the flower of Great Desire, with its endless, unattainable, incomprehensible perfection. She bent to me, and the taste of her lips . . . "

Here the young man fell to silence, becoming once more, as Marshfield saw, quite abstracted from his surroundings. In the little dark room his countenance seemed almost to be faintly luminous, as if actually reflecting some distant glory of light. Of his own accord, however, and to all appearance as unconsciously as he had ceased it, after a while he resumed his narrative.

"She said to me—in the words of Thais of Athens—she said: 'Thou shalt indeed be King among men, and I, thy goddess, shall give thee that kingdom.' And on her words vast horizons were spread before me, resplendent with colour, alive with Olympian revelation. Her voice was a melody, heart-stirring to exquisite pain. Her whole presence, while it filled my intellectual faculties with that completeness of joy that baffles even Desire, roused my bodily senses to an equal pitch of delight. I have still," said Dalrymple, opening his hand and nervously stretching his fingers, "something of that unspeakable sensation of touch. It came back as an echo just now, even as I

felt the cold hilt of my sword. 'Thou shalt be King among men . . . ' I almost wish," he added, with a sort of anger, "she had not said *that*. The words haunt me."

There was a silence, broken only by the pacing of the sentry outside, and the muffled sound of hoarse laughter from the adjacent guard-room.

"It was Aspasia's saying, you know—not Thais'," said Marshfield (the omniscient even to the tradition of the great Priestesses of Love), unable to resist the pedantic opportunity—"But, well?"

"Well," said Dalrymple, who started from his fresh musing and looked round with a blank stare, "that is all. Something disturbed me. The glory faded. I found myself bare and cold, and yet half-drunk with the memory. And now——"

Here, suddenly, arose from without the raucous call of the sentry: "Guard, turn out!" Hurried footsteps, the clanging of butt ends on the pavement, the sergeant's rapid command, told of the picket falling in, and rudely called back the forgetful Dalrymple from his classical roaming. He sprang up, but not before the door was angrily opened to admit the Captain of the day.

It was an Officer of Engineers, rusty of hair, purple of countenance, who, without acknowl-

edging the subaltern's salute, called out in needlessly overbearing tones:

"What is the meaning of this, Sir? Your guard never turned out till I was almost at the door. Your men don't know their work, Sir. What were you about—Asleep? You don't look quite awake yet. Now, Sir, nothing to report? Of course! This is *not* the way to do duty, as I shall take care that you are made aware. Perhaps, in future, the rules as to convict guard may be better enforced!" with a frown at the impassible Marshfield. "Now you may turn your guard in." And the Engineer, delighted no doubt at bottom to catch a linesman tripping, betook himself to another part of his round.

Dalrymple, blushing with vexation, stood a moment silent, biting his lip; then he went out and mechanically dismissed the guard.

"Never had to swallow a snake of that kind," he muttered, as he came back, casting a rueful glance at his friend—"and from a d——d carrotty weather-glass sapper!" he added, cursing with a sharp return to garrison vernacular, expressive of corps prejudice.

Then after a while: "Is it not like a warning? A sobering descent from the heights, old friend! I did forget to visit that last sentry, you know. I really feel as if I had been bewitched. But never again!"

It was near sundown; in due course Dalrymple marched off his party, in great gloom. Marshfield, on his side, slowly returned, deeply pensive and discovering, at odd corners of his meditation, sundry instances comparable to his friend's psychological struggle in other phenomena:—the stamp of previous impressions on the brain of younger life, reappearing in unforeseen wise, even as the die once applied on soft clay, smooth it and obliterate it as you will on the potter's wheel, will reassert itself in the baking. Or again the inevitable ecstatic neurosis of the contemplative anchoret, living in the midst of yearning for irrealisable images—while, on the other hand, the simple abnegation, the devotion to the work-a-day task, in the Sister of Charity (mental material of the same stuff), lead to the wondrous serenity of spirit which is the glory of such a life.

How long would Dalrymple's peace, his satisfaction with self and with the ambient world, be disturbed by this visionary excursion, Tannhaüser-like, to a Venusberg of modern conception? It would be curious to see—and Marshfield, with his characteristic calm selfishness, resolved to throw no hint of any likelihood of his departure for some days to come.

That evening, however, beyond a certain consciousness and forced joviality, there was

little to observe about his friend's manner in mess or ante-room. There was, on the other hand, a certain tendency to taciturnity when they found themselves once more alone in their quarters and no further anatomising of Dalrymple's thoughts could be achieved. All that was apparent was a shade of feverishness in his eyes and on his lips; and all that could be noted of any import was the valediction, about midnight:

"I shall leave you to your slumbers. As for me, you know," with an attempt at self-banter, "I should have abandoned you much sooner if another meeting such as that you heard of to-day could ever occur again. But dreams are not bespoken—worse luck!"

On this confession of weakness Marshfield saw the red and gold jacket disappear. But for many hours, until he himself dropped asleep, he could hear his neighbour moving about restlessly in the next room.

The morning brought its budget. It was Dalrymple who called up the Observer. The young soldier's face was tired, and there were blue lines under his eyes, but a hardly subdued joyousness lighted his countenance. That was ominous.

"I have to take a musketry party to Gravesend—have you a mind to march twenty miles

with us? Yes? Right! We shall not be back till night."

And thus, on the second day, Marshfield found himself tramping the weary road across a snow-covered country, on the flank of a strong company.

Something fresh had evidently happened to his friend. Dalrymple seemed to tread upon air; joyousness radiated from his whole being. True, he was absent minded at times, but now it was with no moodiness. Once the freedom of the "march at ease" had been reached, as the men began to light their pipes and to swing along merrily to the trolling of an occasional song, his laugh and jest and gait were of the merriest. But never a word would he vouchsafe in answer to the insinuating inquiries of the Observer.

It was only on the return march, when animal spirits had much evaporated, and when the occasional fits of abstraction became more frequent, that Marshfield, having reached the end of his tether of patience, fired his point-blank question:

"To judge by your mood," he said, "you have not renewed your Endymion-like experience last night——"

Dalrymple looked up quickly.

"On the contrary," he said, but further remained mute.

"So ho!" said Marshfield. "And what living shape did the Symbol of the World's Beauty assume this time?"

Dalrymple seemed to hesitate for want of words.

"It was the same—the same, Marshfield," he whispered at length, with an odd thrill in his voice. "And yet, there was a difference. The first time she came, what shall I say? . . . it was like the almond blossom. Last night . . . can you understand? it was the pomegranate —the cactus in flower!"

"I think I do. Campaspe made you King?"

After a moment's reflection Dalrymple looked round and nodded.

"And yet you seem pretty well reconciled to this damp and muddy world," remarked Marshfield, with some resentment, dragging his weary feet along by the side of his brisk-stepping companion.

Gaily answered Dalrymple, his eyes bright with joyous fire:

"Were this world ten times more dismal, I have the key of another, of the real one!"

"Well?" insisted Marshfield.

The Officer turned his head abruptly away, and, with a smile on his lips, swung on in fine rhythm to some unheard march of joy. Bars of pallid winter sunshine were breaking the western clouds and gilding the wreaths of

vapour that hung over the distant town, their goal. Every man's face in the Company, tramping towards this faint sunset, caught up some of its yellow gleam. But Marshfield saw, as once before in the convict guard-room, that Dalrymple's countenance, palely luminous, like an alabaster lamp, was lit as from within.

"'*The light that never was, on sea or land*,'" he quoted to himself. Then, under an increasing sense of irritation, he spoke again, with something of a sneer:

"Well, and what happened?"

Dalrymple halted a second and threw the secret flame of his eyes upon his friend. He seemed, from a great height, to look down with wonder upon a world grown strange to him. For the third time Marshfield reiterated his query:

"What then, Endymion?"

"Ah," cried Dalrymple, and the inner glow seemed to flash out in an extraordinary smile—"what then! *Can Endymion tell*, do you think?"

His voice broke upon this note of exultation, and, the next moment, he had caught up the tramp of his men, leaving the tired and discomfited Observer to hobble in rear, as slowly as he list, towards the dying sunset.

. . . . . .

That evening, at mess, Dalrymple, whose suppressed exultation contrasted oddly with his

tired face, elicited some sensation and a certain amount of indulgent disapproval among his peers by occasional lapses into unintelligible phraseology, alternating with fits of dreaminess. And, after dinner, as if yielding to an irresistible attraction, he was observed to draw nearer and nearer the piano. Then, softly, his eyes lifted as if trying to recall some fleeting memory, he began to pick out a strange, weird chant, broken now and then with startling harmonies. It was halting and unfinished, like some incomprehensible thought that has no logical conclusion—like the song of the thrush, a fragment of audible beauty, ending, incomplete, in sudden vacancy.

To Marshfield the unchastened melody was admirably alluring, for he fully guessed its origin. But the red-jacketed youths rebelled loudly at "the infernal miawing. Dalrymple! —What the dickens was the matter with the fellow to-night? Let them have *Chin-Chin Chinaman*, something with a tune in it, or something a fellow could make head and tail of, anyhow!"

Whereupon Dalrymple, the sweet-tempered, got up in a sudden inexplicable heat of anger and left the room. Marshfield promptly followed; and as his friend showed a disposition to part at the bedroom door without further parley, arrested him with the blunt remark:

"That was the voice of your Vision, of course? I wish I could have it noted, if it is still with you."

Dalrymple shook his head vehemently.

"It cannot be noted! What I tried to put into sound was no nearer the truth than the sketch of a man who cannot draw would be to the grace of his Love's face. It is not to be noted in waking music. Besides," he added vaguely, "waking music has no sense."

Marshfield, if truth be said, began to feel a commencement of alarm for his friend's brain. In his mind flitted for a moment a reminiscence of Slav traditions concerning the Vampire. He forthwith resolved that one of his future investigations should be whether the *fons et origo* of the legends might not be traced to similar neurotic break-down, more frequent among a dreamy, musical, over-imaginative and especially melancholy people, than among occidental races.

The next morning he found Dalrymple in a deplorable frame of mind. Sleep, the young man said, in a tone of suppressed rage, had forsaken him. An absolutely wakeful night is distressing enough at all times, but a sleeplessness that means the loss of a treasure greater than all the world can give is *Hell.* So Dal-

rymple said, with a look more expressive even than the word itself.

Even if Marshfield's all-dominating curiosity had not urged him to remain by his friend's side, mere humanity would have made him do so.

On the third day the dreamer was in a parlous state. Not a minute, not a second, of the expectant hours had blessed unconsciousness descended upon him. The magnificent look of vigour which, on the first occasion of their meeting, had been so striking an element of his whole presence, was already a thing which memory could hardly realise.

The Major in command, who held the lad in special affection (they had spent a hard time together among the Afridis), insisted on his going on leave, to recruit.

Thus it came to pass that Marshfield took charge of the patient (who now eagerly clung to the one companion capable of realising his condition), and that he was able to watch the progress of this rare mental disease. His notes are full of interest, and would furnish matter (indeed, they may some day) for a weirdly fantastic tale.

There supervened in Dalrymple a condition of life which Marshfield describes as an intel-

lectual phthisis, a consumption of the soul. It was a crepuscule of the mind, which, as the crepuscule of day, leads to nothing but darkness.

He had lost all interest in real life. The fate he had dreaded in older days had overtaken him to the full.

"Our common world," he would assert, "is nothing but greyness, my friend. There is not a taste in your Universe, not an impression which is more than a muffled parody of what I have known."

"The world is not meant solely for transcendent delight," Marshfield would object, with an exact sense that unanswerable platitudes are the best foils to dithyrambics. "There are *other* intellectual goals to be reached, during this incarnation."

The vision never returned. Sleep, indeed, was ultimately restored to him in a measure; and that doubtless saved him from madness. But his fits of despair after the nights that he had "slept in vain," as he expressed it, were at first more passionate even than after the nights of waking agonised invocations.

Melancholy had now finally marked Dalrymple for her own. But the manliness, innate and cultivated in the youth, saved him from degradation. There could be no joy, but there was at least some rest in the fulfilment of

Duty—with this he never allowed anything to interfere.

A curious characteristic, one which displayed the soundness of the youth's mental strength at core for all its accidental fever, was that melancholia with him never turned to sourness or irritability. He never seemed to lose his winning sweetness of temper among his brother officers, or his solicitude for the welfare and pleasures of his men. Gradually he resumed the healthy tenor of a soldier's life, and in all appearance save in gaiety became something like his old self again. His work, however, was performed with what might be compared to the dry perfection of an automaton, and both comrades and men long missed the joyous alertness that had endeared him to all.

But, one day, the summons came to prepare for active service once more. Then, as the weary soldier, after a restless sleep in which he has dimly striven again and again to fulfil his mechanical round of work, awakes at the clear voice of the bugle-call and hails with joy the dawn of the battle-day, so did Edward Dalrymple, the dreamer, awake.

He seemed to take up his life again with enthusiasm: and never, as those said who saw him again on that last day, did any one lay it down with a higher heart. They found his

body on the lip of the enemy's trenches; and it was said that the beauty on his dead face was such, the smile upon his lips so exquisite in its joy, that the very soldiers of the burying party, all hardened to their materialising task, begged to look and look again before wrapping him away in that insatiable earth that had already drunk in so much gallant blood.

Marshfield often wondered whether at that supreme moment his friend had indeed been vouchsafed once again the glory of his Vision: or whether the smile had been called upon his stiffening lips by the knowledge that, through Duty, he had at last and for ever grasped—Peace.

THE DEATH-DANCE

TO

MRS. CHARLES BLUNDELL OF CROSBY

LOUISE DE VZOVICS, WHOSE CHILD-FEET WERE
FORCED TO TREAD THE MEASURES
OF THE DEATH-DANCE.

The Death-Dance

As age advances upon me, past memories grow sweet to linger over. Strange it is how easily the painful and the terrible in our experiences are forgotten in a busy life—forgotten or but recalled with a placid savour of interest. A merciful dispensation no doubt, as the cant phrase runs. Yet, now and again, even to the old man may not a chance concurrence of impressions bring back long-past and seeming dead emotions, and that with well-nigh the poignancy of the actual event?

This evening as we returned to our home, my wife and I, after a mighty pleasant walk through the woods, where overhead the rising breeze whispered loud as it hurried through the branches, where underfoot the ground was soft and silent save now and then for some breaking twig, we passed from the dim grey twilight into the deserted library wrapped in darkness; shutters already closed and lamps as yet unkindled. There being that day some festivity at our little village to which the servants had permission to go, the neglect was to be viewed with leniency; and, laughing, we groped for lights. My hand was the first to meet the box wherein lay enshrined one

solitary match. I struck it; it flashed brilliantly, and went out.

Now, in that brief illumination, arose before my unexpecting eyes a picture from the past, lurid, terrible, living; and the darkness which ensued was filled with crowded memories of a scene enacted long ago in my sallet days and far away from this peaceful English land. Yet what really met my sight was only my dear wife's face as it started, eager and half smiling, from the impenetrable gloom and then sank into nothingness.

She is no longer young, in years—facts are facts; the once glorious sheen of her black hair has changed to the tints of frosted silver; and though her eyes are brilliant with the light of an ever-youthful soul, though she is still to me the bride of my manhood's love, to all the world we are most undeniably an elderly couple. But the face I seemed to see, which indeed I saw in a strange phantasmagoria born of lightning recollection, was young with the peach-bloom of youth; and the frame of the picture was not the silent, warm library with its carpet and curtains and tall array of books, but the boles of two rugged poplar-trees in the thickest midst of a well-remembered wood—Apáli-er-döseg.

I knew it at once, that disastrous forest of

elms and ivy-grown poplars between the Waag and the Danube, scene of so much indecisive fighting, so much useless butchery. And the gleam that reveals this fearsome, lovely face peering at me eagerly from out the darkness, is a long flash-in-the-pan of one of those obsolete muskets used by the Hungarian guerrillas in the year '49. And I, scarce a year free from school thraldom, am riding, clad in the cream-white of the Royal Imperial Chevaulegers, at the head of a reconnoitring party pushing towards Comorn; I am, in fact, an inexperienced cornet filled, half with pride in his responsibilities, half with trepidation, lest by some mischance I should fail in accomplishing all that is expected of an Austrian officer and an Englishman to boot.

A long way to look back—nearly half a century, forsooth! Yet, behold! I am as livingly in the woods of Apáli as on the day when I killed my first man on Imperial duty. Overhead the evening breeze sways the tall poplars; underfoot the soft earth receives the trample of our chargers noiselessly save for the breaking of some dried twigs. No light but that of a young moon, pale and barely sufficient through the arches of foliage to guide us along the rude forest road.

All at once the rhythm of the march, with its faint accompaniment of clicking arms and har-

ness, is drowned in a hellish clangour. Ahead, on either side, spring, singly and in groups, the long red flashes of musket-fire; the hissing lead crashes through our files, and above us snaps in the branches.

There is one short moment of suspense, an interval of stillness broken only by the angry guttural orders of my sergeant to the troopers, the plunging and neighing of some wounded horses, and, rapidly approaching, the thudding gallop of our detached files falling back on their supports. Then a shrill whistle sounds, upon which rises all around us the blood-curdling Hungarian yell, while, as if vomited by the black earth, leap up into our midst a swarm of fighting demons. Almost before a single pistol-shot can leave our ranks the brown rusty scythes are already at work among our horses' feet, and the noble beasts go down shrieking, mutilated; almost before one loyal blade can leave the scabbard, half my trim and smart dragoons—choice troops trained with precise care in the art of arms—have rolled into the mud, cursing and groaning, and hideously ripped, under the thrust of an uncouth pike or the throw of a peasant's sickle.

With a wail, the hurried blast from the trumpeter at my side expires almost from the first note as, half turned in the saddle to wind his warning call to the main body, he is hurled

from his seat, his back cloven by a woodman's axe. The same savage weapon is next raised upon me, and would send me even then to my last account but for a frantic kick from my poor trumpeter's horse, which, with unusual poetic justice, brains his master's destroyer on the spot. All this within the span of two seconds.

I am seized with despair. A vision of disgrace—the wholesale destruction of the party entrusted to me—rises like fire before my mind. And I have not even struck a blow for the honour of the white Atilla. A frenzy to flesh once at least my virgin sword before meeting inevitable death fills my whole being at one shiver. At that moment my own brave charger falls under me, hamstrung and with gaping throat; I am up again in an instant, free of him, and blindly throw myself upon a dark group just visible a few yards in front.

And here, at last, is something to pierce and to hack; to assuage with deep red draughts, black-dropping in the moonlight, the white fury of my sabre's thirst. And here, as reeling round intoxicated with the first taste of destruction, I seek a fresh object to work upon, rises the flash of a well-primed pan, red in the gloom of the close growing trees; and on the instant a flight of shot strike like so many cuts of a whip deep into my flesh.

Not because I am badly hit—and this I know

though my blood is too hot to feel much pain just then—do I stop, transfixed in my headlong rush, but because of the image which flames into being and is lost with the musket flash. It is a face of weird loveliness, oval, very white, framed darkly by the hair that escapes from under a broad cavalier hat; a young, girlish face, with dilated burning eyes and a small, full-lipped mouth slightly opened, seeming to breathe vengeance even as the eyes dart the most exultant triumph.

The vision in the midst of carnage—for the rebels are despatching my wounded men, and I hear on every side, with burning heart of shame, German cries for mercy, intermingled with the savage "*Eljen Kossuth!*" and the deep-mouthed imprecation of fight—seems to my darkening senses as some strange revelation of the Valkyrie, that wondrous creature of Teutonic imagination, who comes to ease the dying soldier's agony with promises of a glorious Walhalla.

A moment later a sudden sickness comes upon me, and it is as if the earth rises up to buffet me; I am certain my last hour has come. But, as I fain would compose my mind to a suitable state of compunction, the beautiful heathen phantasm ever dances uppermost in the midst of the cloud that is rolling swiftly over all my being. . . . .

"Well, dear," said my wife's tranquil voice, from the depth of darkness, "what are you dreaming about, standing there, so still?"

As she spoke, the door was pushed open, a tardy servant appeared with lights, and the spell was broken. I was once more in the antique, restful library of Bycross Hall. Once more I was an old man, hale and happy for all his narrow escapes and all the barbarous scenes witnessed and enacted in younger days.

"I thought," said I, "that I saw the astral body of Sarolta!"

And so we fell into memories of the Hungarian War—it is now, and properly, so dignified, though in my young time of Imperial service it was only called a rising, and the Magyars were not "the enemy" but "the rebels"—and we harked back to that reign of terror, through which she then—a mere child—passed unscathed, although it well-nigh encompassed destruction, root and branch, to her family.

And, by a singular coincidence, the evening's post brought news that night of Klapka's death at Vienna; Klapka, the sturdy defender of Comorn, whom Austria's Grand Executioner, Haynau, would so dearly have loved to hang, yet who, long since reconciled and honoured, lived out his peaceful old age under the very yoke he once had laboured to destroy,

even as might Kossuth himself, did he not still prefer a sullen self-imposed exile.*

Now, perhaps, might be a fitting time to write impartially of that extraordinary war which, for all her soldiers' gallantry, brought so little credit to Austria's rule, and which gave Hungary, to compensate so much slaughter and misery, nothing that persistent peaceful agitation might not have secured in later days. A merciless, profitless struggle, degrading alike to Austria's commanders, who, until they received foreign help, failed to achieve victory over Magyar fierceness; and to Hungarian leaders, who, on the day of final defeat, betrayed each other and cravenly abandoned their country in her last agonies.

English favour has, on the whole, weighed on the Hungarian side; on no very precise ground perhaps, for the true case of Royal Hungary against the Empire has hardly been made quite clear. I cannot pretend to discriminate, for I saw the events as a soldier; and a soldier must needs be one-sided. All that I am able to say, whilst the impression of my memories is still green on me, is that whatever may have been the early misdealings of the Emperor with a noble race (now, it must be owned, the strongest prop of a patched Empire), the actual bearing of the Austrian

* This was written in 1893.

army was never as uniformly ferocious, nor was that of the Magyars themselves invariably as noble and moderate as it has long been the fashion to represent it in England.

The series of incidents which the small flame of a match thus brought so vividly back to my mind that I am fain to relate them, are sufficiently typical of the state the land was plunged in, towards the end of the long conflict, to prove maybe of interest to those who judge that bloody period from the sentimental point of view of preconceived sympathy.

What a toy in the hands of blind fortune is a soldier's life! Platitude, say you? So it is. But there are times when truisms assume a very singular particularity. And, when I recall that time, and realise on what mere accidents then depended the thread of an existence which has been very well worth living to me, the old worn saying loses all its triteness.

The riddling of my young body with blunderbuss shots might, under other circumstances, have been held as a sufficiently disastrous casualty for the very first engagement into which I carried it. As the night went, however, it saved my head from the bloody harvest of the scythe-men. As I fell two black shadows bore down upon me; one raised a scythe over my neck. I saw it gleam

under a moon ray without even the power of turning my fixed eyeballs from the sight; before it had time to descend, however, there came a cry from a curiously high-pitched voice, and again the vision of the Valkyrie's face, this time laughing pallidly in the silver light, swam before me. The beautiful lips let fall some words, no doubt in the language of the gods. There was a hoarse laugh. A bayonet tore its way between my shoulder blade and the flesh, driven as it were in mere jocularity, and the silhouettes passed on.

In the anguish of the new wound I tried again to concentrate my mind to prayer, but again the beauteous obsession overmastered all.

Presently it became obvious that I was not progressing with my dying. My wounds began to burn in ever more lifelike fashion, and my brain grew clearer. All around was very still save for a groan now and then, or the struggle of some dying charger.

Through softly waving branches the breeze flustered, and the moonlight fell between the leaves, very cold and fair. With an infinite effort I rolled over on my back and there lay, consorting with dim incongruous phantoms, still waiting for the moment of my passing. So ended my first combat under "the black-and-yellow." For this I had been initiated an

ardent recruit, to the pride of Austrian Service; for this had we hastened from the Italian garrison, light-hearted and glorious through the bright summer days!

Several engagements, as I learned since, took place that night between our advanced patrols and the Hungarian outposts in the nefarious neighbourhood of Comorn, each with more or less similar result. In all their preliminary movements for the concerted Austro-Russian attack upon that stronghold on the unsuccessful second of July, our renowned generals and their seasoned troops were baulked by the indomitable determination of the Hungarian levies and the admirable tactics of Görgey. In fact, the blame and disgrace I so bitterly dreaded in connection with the inglorious butchery in the Apáli woods attached not to me, but to the old-fashioned pedantry and the routine spirit of our generals, who confidently sent the regulation horse-patrol to reconnoitre in a situation where only light infantry should have ventured.

A badly wounded man has no appreciation of time. To him a given span may seem an eternity of torture or the flash of a single thought, according to the state of his brain. After a lapse—I cannot tell how long—a line of men advanced steadily but with caution through the underwood. I believe they were

our own dragoons, but dismounted this time. One of these trod on my hand as he passed along, and I must have given a cry of pain or anger; at any rate he bent down and examined me, and in German called out to his comrades. And presently, a helpless mass of suffering humanity, I was carried away in a great-coat.

The next stage that comes up to memory was my being laid, at dawn, together with a few other white-coated and blood-stained wretches, in a commissariat cart, the merciless jolts of which brought back a miserable consciousness.

Then there was an interlude to the monotonous torture of progression—another skirmish in which a sudden onslaught of hussars, fearless as hawks, swift and howling as tempest wind, swooping down as it seemed from the clouds, nearly succeeded in cutting off the lumbering convoy. But they were beaten off. And more mangled yet living bodies were laid in the cart, among whom not a few of the hussar blue-coats themselves who, but a few moments before, amidst the flashes of their sabre cuts, had yelled their "*Eljen Kossuth!*" with such irresistible energy. And the dreary procession trundled on again.

The sun was high and burning when occurred the next break in the nightmare.

We were lifted from the cart, laid on a wide stretch of gravel, and then and there laved with blessedly cool water; a draught of some acid nectar was next held to my lips, whilst a woman's face, beautiful, tender, motherly, bent over us.

It was as if the blessed Mother of God had driven forth my Valkyrie, yet to my fever-ridden mind there was still some fleeting likeness between the two.

High in front, and on both sides, rose what seemed in my wandering fancy endless vistas of flaming palaces; for in the sunlight the white stone and glass of the stately building glittered with insufferable brightness.

The convoy had, it seems, been handed over to a Russian column on the way; the trim white coats were no longer about us, but, in their stead, unkempt troopers in brown caftans and tall brass-spiked helmets. And these, according to custom, had hastened to deposit their profitless burden at the first available abode.

And thus it came to pass that, for the remainder of the war, I found myself, to my own immediate benefit and future happiness, an inmate of a noble Magyar household.

After the inevitable days of fever and delirium, which in an Austrian ambulance would undoubtedly have landed me in six feet

of earth without the last snug decency of a coffin, but which the vigilant and humane nursing of the Lady of the House—to use an obsolete but graceful phrase—brought me safely through, I, weak as a new-born puppy, began to take notice of my surroundings, and find in life, again, something beyond discomfort and pain.

The Castle of Komjáth, an imposing, comparatively modern building, in the French style which finds favour in Hungary, stands conspicuously on an island formed by two unequal arms of the Neutra; this latter is a stream which a few miles lower down in its course joins the Waag, just before the latter meets the Danube below Comorn. A handsome stone bridge connects the island with either bank and allows a high road to cross the estate from east to west. As but few such structures span the lower course of the Neutra, it was the fate of Komjáth to find itself constantly on the way of marching troops during the whole of the war. In the early spring, whilst the Hungarian star was still in the ascendant, for days did the columns of exultant volunteers, arrogant and rapacious, defile through the estate on their way to the west. Later on in the year, when (to Austria's eternal shame) Russian aid was called in, again did the bridge at Komjáth resound to the tread

of moving armies; and the distracted inmates of the Castle had to watch and keep open house day and night, to attend to the wants of Paskiewiecz's infantry, cossacks, and gunners.

All that was vexing and ruinous enough; but at the time of which I am now talking, that is during the second siege of Comorn, and whilst Görgey still held the field with varying success against the Imperial allies, the suspense of the dwellers at the Castle reached a climax.

It so happened, however, that none of the fierce and merciless engagements which characterized the latter part of the war actually took place at that singularly important strategic point; a matter of curiosity to the soldier, for the holding of that bridge would have been of the utmost importance to either party, and certainly one of congratulation to the owners of that magnificent estate. But it more than once happened that, at different hours of one and the same day, detachments, and even whole regiments, of the three nationalities clattered over the Komjáth bridge. This almost incomprehensible state of affairs I myself witnessed on the first day that I was allowed to leave my couch and to be carried from that wing of the Castle set aside for the wounded, to the drawing-room, where the family was gathered.

This was a privilege less due even to my officer's rank among the many wounded of both parties, which the fortune of war had gathered at Komjáth (although your true Hungarians are great sticklers for rank and status), than to my extreme youth, and to the motherly tenderness of my gracious nurse.

As I sank back on the soft couch under the shaded window, where by the Countess's orders I was laid by my bearers—an ancient gate-keeper and an equally grey-headed steward, the only men left on the estate, all others having long since been peremptorily drafted away under the ironical name of volunteers—I looked round the vast room and breathed in its delicious coolness with a sense of returning life-enjoyment.

One by one my hostess's children—a sturdy boy, and three little dainty maids—came up to kiss my hand, according to the pretty custom of the country. The mother looked on, smiling, wonderfully young and fair to own such a romping brood; beautiful in the deep mourning of recent widowhood, with the characteristic beauty of true Magyar type—rich blooded, bright-eyed, lithe and firm of figure, graceful of motion, and caressing of address.

"Here," thought I, with grateful heart, "is little of the blind hatred for the Austrian tyrants which is said to animate every Hun-

garian soul from the lowest to the highest in the land."

But even as the thought grew I looked up, I knew not why, to meet the sloe-black eyes of a girl in rich peasant dress who stood sullenly near the door, and seemed to be in attendance on the children. Those eyes shot such bitter animosity at me that, weak as I was, I felt my countenance change.

The Countess followed the direction of my startled glance, and her smile faded into an expression of stern thoughtfulness I had not seen before upon her tender face. She gave, however, with apparent unconcern, some order to the patriotic damsel—an order for refreshment for me, as it turned out.

Somewhat curiously watching, I saw the vindictive hatred of the black eyes transferred from me to the Countess, and felt an undefined apprehension, although I was then far from realising the peril to which my hostess's kindness to the wounded enemy exposed her, and the bearing which in those troublous times the ill-will and malice of a dependent could have upon the fate of a whole family.

After a second's defiant pause the girl tossed her plaits of raven hair and disappeared upon her errand. The mistress let her thoughtful gaze fall for a moment on the children; then with a sigh seemed resolutely to dismiss the

disturbing idea, and began a cheerful talk with me. She sat beside my couch by the window, where through the drawn curtains a ray of sunshine fell slanting on the rich black coils of her hair, and gilt the delicate olive fingers, busy with sweet impartial charity upon lint-making for all the sufferers of the war.

"Surely," thought I, in dreamy enthusiasm, "this is the very type of noble womanhood!" And content to lie still and admire and worship, the disturbing incident of the maid passed from my mind.

But this placid state of happiness was not to endure long. The old steward presently entered upon us with disordered mien. Pointing to the west, through the window, he uttered in his tongue a short phrase, evidently of serious import, and handed the field-glasses to his mistress. She rose, and as the children rushed to the window, drew back the curtains to scan the distant road. Half dazzled by the streaming light, I raised myself on the pillow and looked forth too.

After a few seconds the Countess paused in her search to exchange a few hurried words with the old man, who, pointing at me, ran into the middle of the room and halted with distracted irresolution. She raised the glasses to her eyes again, then I saw her bosom heave with a deep sigh of relief. She gave a quick

order, and sat down again by my side, whilst the steward hastened from the room.

"Do not be alarmed," she said, as she gave another glance out of the window. "These are Russians, and we have not much to fear, except plunder from the men and insoleuce from the officers, so long as Imperial orders are obeyed. Fortunately, with good watch outside, and this little friend here" (tapping the field-glass), "we can always have the black-and-yellow floating in time to show that we are not rebels."

Even as she spoke I could see from my couch the black eagle spread on the ample yellow folds of the Austrian standard rapidly running up the staff over the main gateway. She gave a laugh.

"Otherwise," she continued, "we should be treated as holding with the revolution. Poor Miklos, faithful servant! His old legs have much ado to keep up now with Austrian loyalty, now with Hungarian patriotism; for woe would indeed betide us were the Kossuthists to find us with the abominated emblem waving over our land. But we have other colours ready against such time when they appear on the scene. I think I had almost rather risk Austrian severity than Hungarian vengeance, but I own to you that my chief object is to avoid giving offence to either side.

I should have had to relegate you in haste to your hospitable quarters, were it a body of our patriots that now threatens a visit at Komjáth," she added with a smile, "for to find a white-coated monster in our immediate circle would brand us traitors of the deepest dye."

As she spoke, the rumour had drawn nearer; the clink and tramping of the column, and a melancholy chant, rising and falling to the measure of the men's pace, no doubt by order and for lack of more stirring music, resounded in the courtyard and past the Castle windows.

"Little mamma," cried the boy in German, "the soldiers are going by." And in truth there seemed to be no sign of their halting.

"Thank God!" said the lady fervently.

But the little Count presently whispered in great excitement—

"Oh, no, there are some riding-men in green —officers—that stop. Little mamma, they are coming in!"

My hostess took up her work again with admirable composure; and a moment later the old steward, a bleached look of terror on his face, introduced four or five officers, who strode in, arrogantly, cap on head, and cast angry looks around.

The Countess rose with her usual dignity. But the senior officer, who seemed to be a

brigadier, broke out at once, in rasping and incorrect German.

"What is the meaning of this?" he inquired, without the slightest formula of courtesy. "My scouts report that the Imperial flag only appeared on this house on the approach of our troops. Is this another hidden nest of revolutionists?"

As soon as she was allowed to speak, the Countess in her firm and quiet voice briefly explained the situation of the household. Meanwhile, the Russian's suspicious eyes fell upon me in my corner by the window-sill, and his lowering countenance cleared.

Lying at my ease in the family circle, propped up on cushions, with a half-finished bowl of broth by my side, I was personal and sufficient evidence that an Imperial officer was not looked upon in the house as an enemy.

After exchanging a few words with me, the brigadier professed himself content with the state of affairs at Komjáth, and he and his party, assuming a less hostile manner, drank down with bearish heartiness a few glasses of the Arak which had been, as a matter of course, brought up for their refreshment. One of them unceremoniously refilled a pocket-flask out of the decanter.

During that time the little Count, somewhat reassured, had stepped up to one of the offi-

cers, and looking into his hairy face with artless interest, stretched forth an audacious little hand towards the gilded hilt of his curved sabre.

"Wouldst thou like to see it work?" asked the savage in bad German, with a loud though not ill-natured laugh. And he forthwith drew the weapon from the scabbard and struck with a knowing sweep at the nearest thing, a dainty little Vernis Martin table which stood at the Countess's elbow. It was cloven in halves; the Countess could scarcely repress a shriek, and the boy burst into a roar of mingled anger and fear.

Charmed, however, with his own pleasantry, which his companions had witnessed approvingly—

"Here, young master," exclaimed the giant, awkwardly fumbling in his pocket. From this receptacle he produced a slab of chocolate, which he placed on the palm of his hand, and with the same weapon cut it into several bits, thereby showing a new kind of dexterity. "Here, take and cry no more." There were dried blood-stains on the blade.

"Thank you," said the Countess, sweeping hurriedly forward, to forestall her son's indignant refusal; and taking the chocolate from the Cossack's grimy fingers, "Iss, Paulchen," she said with a compelling look.

But the child passionately resisted; and, very much amused, the detestable crew took their departure with what no doubt they considered a good grace.

"Your presence here to-day has saved us from worse," said the Countess, with her sweet calm smile, as I too, with youthful heat, began to inveigh against the behaviour of our allies, and lament the damage they had caused. "There are ghastly tales of the indignities these people have heaped on Magyar households."

It pleases me to think that what she said was indeed the fact; that my presence that day was a protection to her and hers; for it was through the same circumstance—her heavenly goodness to a sick lad—that destruction hovered over her whole household but a little while after.

In due course we heard the welcome sound of the last Russian's departure. Not long afterwards the westerly breeze brought to our ears the first booms of gun-fire in the direction of Comorn, where another general engagement was developed. These terrible whispers of destruction lasted many hours.

After dusk the unfortunate house was again filled with troops—Honveds this time. At that hour, happily, being still but a poor invalid, I was once again in my bed among the sick and wounded. It was the luck of war that

there were at the time actually more Hungarians in this extempore hospital than others, for the defeated Kossuthists were not in a mood to treat with leniency a house that harboured too many Imperials.

During the short glimpse we had of these visitors, I trembled for our benefactress; I little wotted then that if the Magyar, defeated, baffled, and thirsting for vengeance, was to be dreaded, the Magyar exulting in triumph would prove more sinister still.

The chief of the party that visited the Castle —an enormous man with matted black whiskers, loathly elf-locks, and dirty bandages hiding half a face one could not find it in one's heart to desire a fuller view of—entered upon the dim silence of the infirmary with a brooding air and a vast deal of unnecessary clangour, accompanied by several lantern-bearers. He passed from bed to bed, cynically prodding every man with the tip of his scabbard and questioning him in Hungarian. On those who could but falter their replies in German, he bestowed a curse and an ominous glower of his solitary eye.

One of our melancholy company, a Russian who had been very feeble all day, was found to be dead; him the colonel spurned with his foot, and the carcase was forthwith carried away.

But, apparently, the account given by the Hungarian wounded of their treatment at Komjáth was sufficiently favourable, for the truculent intruder at last went out without further action, only stopping a moment over my bed to examine me with a malevolent grin.

Here the visitation ended; and then, for the second time in the same day, did my dear lady's charity—bestowed for no ulterior reason, but solely through the sweet promptings of her woman's heart—conjure misfortune from her home.

"And so," thought I, "it must always be; here can neither Magyar nor Imperialist ever find aught but to praise and bless." Alas! I was young in those days, and knew not how much lower than the beast man may sink when his passions are unchained in prolonged internecine war.

For two days matters went according to ordinary routine; the hours that I could bear to be up and dressed were most blissfully spent by me in the Countess's company. It was natural enough that by this time, boy-like, I should have fallen deeply in love with her; a worshipping, distant love, content to feast on kind looks and gentle words, to treasure the memory of a smile or of the touch of a motherly hand.

But on the third morning no one came to

fetch me as usual. And then I was left, day after day, to drag out their weary length from morn till night, in the melancholy surroundings of the hospital room—this with a sore heart and wondering, at first; by-and-by with secret ungrateful revilings.

The Countess passed daily through the ward as usual, but only addressed a few gentle, indifferent questions and remarks to me; the usual attendants brought me food and helped me to dress.

"She is tired of me," I thought. "Of course it becomes a bore in the end to have a miserable invalid to dance attendance upon for so many hours a day. She is tired of me, and now I am to be dropped. Why first be so kind to be now so cruel! Why not let me die when I was so near death!" I lay outside my camp bed and hugged my injuries in true boy fashion.

At length, about the fifth day, there came a rumour among the patients—I can hardly say whence it originated—a grin of exultation spread from one wan, swarthy Hungarian face to another all round the ward, while the few Imperials feigned a mighty indifference.

There had been some great Hungarian victories; Kossuth now held the whole land indeed; the National Cause triumphed. When I was being dressed during the day, I rose

giddily from my bed, a sudden sense of fury and impotency filling my poor weak frame. The revolutionists triumphant, and I—I of the gallant Chevau-legers—reduced to this!

A few jocular but not ill-meant taunts—for common sufferings ever tend to fill the chasm of antipathy—were thrown at me by grinning rebels as I passed their beds. At the door I fell upon the old steward, who was just entering with food and wine.

"Are these news true?" I cried, incautiously.

The old man looked at me angrily, and motioned me back. I read such terror in his looks—though he had always seemed so craven a body in my foolish eyes that I had hitherto made rather a joke of him to the Countess and her children—that I returned to my bed; and, as I sat on the edge of it, a miserable object enough, with feeble legs dangling, longing to be up and doing, or, at any rate, back with my hostess to preside in her councils with valuable advice, there came into the room the youngest child laden with a big basket full of fruit.

It had been the custom of the mother to send her little ones from time to time to bring the "poor sick soldiers" such dainties as she had to give, so I was not astonished at sight of the small messenger. A pretty creature she was, not more than five years old, but bold as

a bantam, with a mischievous dark face from which shone out dark hazel eyes as bright as a hawk's. With grave sweetness the little maid distributed her burden.

When she came to the officer's couch—that was mine—with a broad smile she drew herself up, tapped her heels together, and made the smartest military salute. All eyes were fixed on her, and there was an answering smile on most of the suffering faces. None but myself, however, took in the message which the child, well-drilled beforehand, delivered in French.

"Monsieur l'officier," she said, in quaintly precise accents, "ne faites pas l'étonné, mais prenez du fruit; et trouvez moyen d'aller bientôt dans le long corridor où vous attend madame ma mère. . . . C'est un secret," she added, handing me the basket. Then she made another salute and went away laughing.

By-and-by, leaving my companions in sickness engaged upon their afternoon refection, I made my way with a natural air from the ward, and downstairs to the long, cool corridor whither the rendezvous called me.

In the dark recess of a small passage leading to some unused apartments I found my hostess. She stretched out her hand to me, and—I don't know why—tears rose to my eyes.

"What must you have thought of our strange

discourtesy these last days?" she said, in a melancholy voice, hardly raised above a whisper. "It has not been our wont, I assure you, to treat honourable guests thus—but, alas, my friend, it was as much for your sake as for our own. I have been denounced—denounced by one of my own people, by a girl to whom I have been as a mother . . . but let that pass. She has a lover in the Kossuth ranks, and, as I say, I have been denounced as an Imperialist. And that, you know, for a full-blooded Hungarian, on Hungarian soil, is the deepest treachery."

She gave a faint smile and paused. I remembered the dark damsel of the vindictive eyes with growing anticipation of evil.

"Surely, surely," I cried, "it was not because of your heavenly goodness to me!"

"Hush!" she whispered, "not so loud! God alone knows how many spies I may now have in my household." Then she added with exquisite simplicity, "Believe me I do not regret the little I have done for you; it has been a sore grief for me to have to neglect my guest. But I am standing, as it were, on a volcano. The Nationalists are victorious on every side, and tales have come to us that they are as unsparing as they are swift in their reprisals. We would have sought safety in flight, I and my little ones and our good Miklos; for two days we have watched our

chance, but the servants were also on the watch; we dared not."

"Perhaps," I stammered in horror, "when I deliver this place from my presence, the cause of irritation will be gone, this senseless animosity against you will die of itself. And, you know, most gracious lady, it is my duty to try and rejoin the colours as soon as ever this cursed weakness allows me to make the attempt."

"Alas," she said, "and if you do I shall be but doubly convicted of guilt, accused of encompassing your escape."

I heard her in an anguish of perplexity. I had been looking forward to the instant when I could, with the barest chance of success, make a bold try to reach the nearest Austrian outposts; for one recurring burden in my long spells of reflection was the dread of any appearance to have tarried too long from the duties of the field. But how could I risk bringing fresh misfortune upon that noble lady to whom, albeit most innocently, I had already been the cause of so much anxiety?

She, herself, made no attempt to dissuade me from what I had termed my duty. The generosity of her silence smote me to the heart. I took my resolve, and, as I kissed her hand—

"At least then," I whispered earnestly, "I shall be near you, whatever betide."

She looked at me—great gawky lad that I was—as a mother might, and said, quietly:

"We are in God's hand; but at least you are warned. You understand. And now you must go, for this, too, is dangerous to both of us."

Again I kissed her hand and left her. As I emerged from the shade into the light of the great windows at the turning of the passage, I came face to face with the very girl to whom I imputed the base ingratitude of denouncing her mistress. She was in the act of drawing on her shoes.

I started back with an instant flash of conviction that we had noiselessly been tracked to our secret interview, and was appalled at the thought of the capital this creature's malice could, under the circumstances, make of our innocent conversation.

She dropped me an insolent, mocking curtsey, and went by, rapping on her heels, without a word. The look in her eyes was this time triumphant in its hatred.

Heavy of heart, I re-entered the sickly atmosphere of the ward which, as matters stood, was already much like a prison to me, weighing in the uneven balance of a sick man's mind the pros and cons of a dilemma, the most trying perhaps to a soldier that can be conceived. But the problem, as far as I was concerned, was rudely solved that day.

Early in the sultry afternoon there came, without, a great clatter of hoofs and trailing scabbards; and vigorous *Teremtete's*, with other Hungarian expletives bursting from the new-comers, testified fully to the horsemen's nationality even before an under officer of hussars tramped into the room and placed a sentry at the door, after which it was patent that I and my fellow Imperials were to regard ourselves as prisoners.

Later on there floated in through the open window the blare of military bands, distant at first, then nearer and nearer till it sounded in the court of honour itself, amid an extraordinary noise and confusion which presently spread throughout the whole mansion.

Although no information could be drawn from the taciturn hussar, who, with his drawn sabre on his knees, sat on a bench near the door, smoking his red clay-pipe, it was easy to guess, of course, that the headquarters of some general had been transferred to Komjáth. But what the gentry were about, to produce such endless bustle, inside and out, such hammering and tramping, exercised my ingenuity in the extreme.

The mystery thickened when at supper-time a note on official foolscap was brought into the ward by a file of soldiers for "Cornet Ainsdale of the Royal-Imperial Chevau-legers," which

note requested his attendance within half-an-hour in the dining-hall, "by request of the Lady of Komjáth."

"By order of General Nagy-Sandor," said the soldier who handed me the missive, as I looked up amazed.

With the calmness born of immediate emergency, and feeling the eyes of all my comrades fixed curiously upon me, I rose from my usual recumbent position, made a deliberate toilet, and donned the damning white coat which I had thrown off in the heat of the day. Then, without a word, I followed my guard.

The house was now as busy as an ant-hill, swarming with men in all conceivable semi-military accoutrements, but bearing peaceably enough dishes, napery or baskets of wine, and driving the distracted maids hither and thither, some with curses, others with laughter and cavalier gallantry.

On the threshold of the dining-room I stopped amazed: in truth it was a strange sight. The walls were hung with green branches and scarves of the Hungarian colours. The great centre table, spread as for a banquet, was laden with magnificent silver plate, which (as I learned since) had been fished up for the occasion from a safe hiding place at the bottom of the well. The room, brilliantly illuminated, was filled with Honved

officers of every rank. A few were in the decent regular Hungarian uniform, the majority were attired, after the melodramatic manner cherished by the revolutionary leaders, in long blue coats tightly compassed by tricolour scarves, high boots, chained and spurred, broad felt hats almost covered by fluttering green or blue plumes, pistols in their belts, and enormous cavalry sabres trailing at their heels.

In the midst of this unseemly throng I presently distinguished the white dresses of the children; and the Countess herself, a patch of darkness among so much garish colour, in her long mourning robes.

The little ones were clinging to her skirts, too frightened, it seemed, even to cry. The boy, his small sunburnt face puckered into a scowl of defiance, stood by her side, and she now and again passed her hand, as if unconsciously, over the short black stubble of his cropped head. She was engaged in earnest intercourse with two officers whose backs were turned to me. A kind of circle was formed round the group, and the cold thought suddenly struck me that she looked as though standing on her trial. My guards stopped just inside the room, waiting for an order to approach, and I was able to watch undisturbed.

There was a stillness in the room, a stillness

most impressive where so many were gathered together. All looks were bent upon the Countess, and her voice, delicate, refined, and strangely controlled, alone broke the silence. Every word fell from her lips as clear as a drop of water; by her eyes alone I guessed there was deadly mischief afoot; they were dark with anguish, yet they never wavered in their earnest fixing of him who seemed chief of the band—a burly brute of most doubtful and unsavoury mien, and more theatrical even than the rest in magnitude of sash, spurs, and feathers.

When she ceased he cleared his throat, spat on the polished floor, and began to address her in judicial, deliberate tones, preserving, as he spoke, the same easy insolent attitude, half resting on his sword, one foot negligently crossed over the other. My young blood—the little that the Valkyrie's buckshot had left in me—boiled in my veins. I would gladly have given it all to be able to strike that ruffian's face as he stood in his idiotic frippery before this high-born lady, so noble in her bearing, so touching in her young widowhood, so beautiful, and so helpless with her children around her.

I could make no sense of his words, but I noted how now and then she shook her head in indignant denial. As she interrupted him at

length he brutally raised his voice and bore down her disclaimers by sheer strength of lung; and then he let fall a short sentence with unmistakable intent. At this there passed, even to my seeing, who could make nothing of it all, a wave of strong emotion through the whole throng of listeners.

The Countess recoiled, her pale face blanched to lividness; and with a gesture I have never forgotten, gathered all her children with both arms into the sweep of her wide skirts, as if she would shut out the horror from their ears.

The general laughed loudly, and wheeling round caught sight of me as I still stood motionless between my two attendants in a frenzy of mute rage, which only an imminent sense of the necessity of self-control enabled me to conceal.

He looked at me keenly for a moment, then in harsh German:

"Young man," he asked, "how long have you served under the black-and-yellow?"

"Six months," I said.

"You are English?"

"I am so."

"Yet the English, I am told, hold for the free Magyar against the accursed Austrian."

This I would have denied, but he cut me short sharply.

"See here, young sir, cast your lot with us and your sword will be at once given back to you, and with it the glorious tricolour sash. Our side is winning and will soon have swept the invaders north, west, and south. You will not be the first—ha, you refuse!"—I had not spoken, but I suppose my face was eloquent enough—"then take your chance. Please yourself. We want officers for exchange—or retaliation. And retaliation, just at present, is the most likely," he added, thrusting his ugly face close to mine with an offensive and significant grin, "for by to-day's news there has been more hanging of patriots in Haynau's lines. And now, since it is our wish, on this festive day, to gratify our gracious hostess, who, we understand, loves an Austrian better than her own people, you will please to conduct her to the supper table."

Thereupon he bellowed forth some order, on which there was a general and noisy move towards the board.

Before he left me, the triumphant brigand said three words to one of my escort, who for the remainder of the night shadowed me with silent pertinacity.

The Countess, whose side I immediately sought, mechanically took my arm and moved with me to the vacant seats which seemed left for us. As I sat down my eyes wandered

vaguely round the table, and marked the children's little heads, in different degrees of proximity to their plates, amidst a group of boyish-looking officers who were laughing and joking with them, kindly enough it must be said. These were at the end, where the juniors of this strange party had collected together. Higher up were less pleasant countenances, hairy and savage, out of which many menacing pairs of eyes were directed towards us. Then, suddenly, as my gaze came nearer home, I saw for the first time the guest who had taken the place of honour on the general's right.

I was transfixed.

There could be no mistaking that face: there, in the flash, was the vision-face that had hovered in the darkness of the Apáli woods!

Although I remained staring at her with a stupefaction which in my weak state I was long in overcoming, the young woman—the lady I should say, for there was no mistaking her high-bred status, from her composed bearing and refinement under her semi-masculine garb—took no notice of me, but carried on a detached conversation with the general, casting, however, ever and anon, a hard look or a cruel smile on my neighbour. And the repast proceeded, noisily on the officers' side, in absolute silence on ours.

At length my hostess spoke. She had sat up

to this, staring at her untouched plate; but now she turned her eyes upon her children, and then upon the woman who had usurped her place at the head of the table, with a long, agonised gaze. The latter met the look with unflinching hardness, and the Countess sighed as if awaking from a dream.

"And that is my sister!" she said to me with tragic simplicity.

Then with her eyes looking as it were into the future—those deep blue eyes, whose beauty was in their sweetness, unlike the haughty Amazon's opposite, which were hard and brilliant as a hawk's—she added—

"And it may be said, in days to come, when this fearful war is a thing of the past, that a defenceless woman and her children were tortured and put to death by people of her own race, through the betrayal of her sister."

"Great God! Impossible! I cannot believe it," I stammered aghast.

As I spoke a thin smile flickering on the red lips of my Valkyrie, showed that, for all her indifferent airs, she was keenly observant of us both. She suddenly leaned forward and fixed me with her burning eyes, and changing her speech to German, which she spoke with a singular hiss, abruptly addressed me.

"Believe it, Herr Lieutenant, believe it, for it may very well be! And if it be your own

fate to survive, pray repeat the tale far and wide!"

There fell a dead silence upon the guests as she uttered these words, and all eyes were directed towards our end. The incredible cold-bloodedness of her speech, the insolence of her gaze, the sense of being watched, stung me from my bewilderment into a show of expostulation.

"It is a hard thing to believe," said I hotly; "the Hungarians are merciless enemies—I have experienced it myself—but they are after all soldiers, civilised men, not savages, to murder women and torture babes."

She answered with bitter emphasis—

"So are you Imperials, soldiers, civilised men, not savages, by your account; but you flog Italian and Hungarian women—that is not torture! You hang patriots, who fight for freedom and rights—that is not murder! Unable to meet us heart to heart, under the fair sun, upon your own strength, you hound up all our rapacious neighbours against us; and these not being yet sufficient to give you victory, you call to your aid tribes of wild beasts from Russia. This is honourable, is it not? So, Herr Lieutenant, we must even fight in the way you taught us. Aye, believe it, believe it! For it is as true as that my betrothed, a noble Magyar fighting for his

rights, has been strangled on Austrian gallows; as true as that I, a woman, took his place among soldiers and have been flogged by Austrian rods. You can tell your chief Haynau, if so it be that you live to return to him, what you shall have seen, a high lady of the land,"—pointing to the Countess—"because she has been proved traitress to her country, hanged at her own gates, yes, and her children, too, that a brood of traitors may not live! Tell him that, Herr Lieutenant, and assure him that there is not a house now, not a corner of our country where treachery, even in thought, can hide itself from Hungarian retribution!"

Against this extraordinary tirade I could at first find no words. The Countess herself, her eyes fixed with an indescribable expression upon her sister's face, remained dumb, as if realising all the uselessness of argument.

"And yet," I retorted at last, still making a faltering effort at expostulation, "you interceded in the woods near Comorn to save me from the scythe. It is to your womanly instinct of pity——"

The contemptuous smile that curled her lips froze the eager words upon my tongue. In bantering tones she spoke—

"Oh, it was you, young sir, was it indeed? And I interceded, say you? You really flatter

yourself! No, no, my pretty officer, I thought you were despatched—that my escopette had done its work. I merely told the man 'twould be useless, and would spoil a pretty corpse!"

There was a loud burst of laughter on this humourous sally at my discomfiture. "But maybe," she added with much significance, "you will lose nothing."

Then the Valkyrie rose and addressed her comrades with a few ringing sentences in her own tongue. Her words suddenly raised a hellish enthusiasm among them, and all at once every man sprang to his feet, hastily filling brimmers of the blood-red wine. And, with the clatter of swords drawn and chairs cast away, there rose within the room the thundering "*Eljen Kossuth!*" which was instantly echoed from outside, where presently the band blared forth in brassy tones the Kossuth March. Thereupon, with spontaneous accord, the feasters' raucous voices took up the chant with much brandishing of swords and dashing of glasses.

Those who have not witnessed Hungarian enthusiasm cannot realise its truly demoniacal frenzy. Through all this uproar pierced the high-pitched shrieks of the children, who, profiting by the confusion, escaped from their captors to run once more into their mother's arms.

To me, choking with indignation, yet held down by bodily weakness and the helplessness of circumstance, the scene was a very nightmare; and that feeling was not a little increased when I noted, as I moved away to remain by the side of the Countess and her piteous little bodyguard, when she tremblingly sought a distant corner, that the sentry, whom I had forgotten, still followed me about, close and silent like a shadow. Then I seem to have lost the exact consciousness of all that followed; but by-and-by, blindly seeking fresh air at the open window, I became aware in the moonlight of many carriages rumbling into the great courtyard; and the band just outside the hall began to play dance music. When I turned round once more I verily believed for a moment that delirium had again overtaken me.

The banquet hall had become a ball-room, and a number of couples were already swirling to the measures of a heart-stirring waltz; the ladies in lowest and gayest of ball-dresses, each displaying in some manner and most conspicuously the red-green-white of Nationalist sympathy, resting white-gloved hands and bare arms on the dirty, worn tunics of the officers.

A young hussar lieutenant, who had just halted beside me, smiled his delight with gleaming white teeth under his black mous-

tache, laughed openly at my stricken countenance, and said, in excellent English—

"Is this not, sir, an exquisite attention of our general to so many people who, likely, must die to-morrow? Making a pleasure of the muster! A good muster, you see. All right-thinking neighbours have been ordered to attend. How much is patriotism, how much fear—ah, how much love for the dance? Well, *dum vivimus, vivamus.* It might almost be taken as our National motto. If you, sir, were even a Viennese (let alone Hungarian) instead of a cool Englishman, invalid though you be, you would have enough fresh life put into you by this music to make you dance till dawn. I love Englishmen though," he added, as he prepared with his panting partner to plunge once more into the maze. "I am sorry to see you here, and not of us. Well, the fortune of war!" and he whirled away from me.

Presently, among the gyrating couples, the Countess herself, half carried on the arm of the Honved general, passed close in front, her dainty black satin slippers following bravely enough the piercing measures of the waltz, in time with the wornout high boots and the silver spurs; but on her face was none of the glow that lit up almost every cheek; the long-lashed eyelids were dropped; already she looked more like a corpse than a living being;

already methought I saw the livid rope mark on that fair throat, and the blood curdled in my veins. A young officer, who found himself without a full-grown partner, had, in cruel fun, seized the youngest child, mute and tearless with terror, and was whirling it at the swiftest pace in and out of the waltzing groups.

A *Danse Macabre* of victims and murderers! And again the word, Fear, so carelessly dropped by the hussar, Fear, antiphon of Patriotism, came to my mind; how many here present had not that grim spectre at the back of their gaiety?

The devoted victim of the morrow had passed through the arms of some half dozen of the chiefs, for ladies were in a minority at this expiatory funeral ball, and she still maintained a brave bearing, dimly hoping, perhaps (though a faint resource indeed), to awaken some chivalrous pity in these savages by her undaunted mien, when, through the open windows, over the swinging measures of music, came the sound of a tearing gallop on the stone bridge. There was a sharp call, a loud word of command, the music stopped suddenly, and presently, as in the hall the dancing couples halted and separated, an officer of hussars entered, covered with dust and begrimed with sweat, who in a peremptory voice demanded the general. And when the latter advanced

and tore open the proffered dispatch, the newcomer looked around with astonished and displeased countenance on the scene of unseasonable revelry.

The message, brief as it seemed, was evidently pregnant with meaning. The general called up his staff around him, a rapid consultation ensued, and several officers forthwith disappeared to carry out orders. Nothing more was now heard in the hall but the buckling of belts, low-voiced comments of the men, whispered words of the ladies as they withdrew to different corners. I saw my blue hussar, making a low bow to the Countess, who had retreated to the further end of the room, where she was again surrounded by her children, address a few words to her, upon which she disappeared behind a group of her guests. And presently he passed me without looking at me; but stooping to pick up his fur busby left in a corner of the window, he said again in English—

"Sir, keep out of sight if you can—best wishes; farewell."

After which with admirable swagger he went to seek his post.

By this time, in the courtyard, the clarions sounded their panting peals, whilst in the village hard by the graver notes of the cavalry trumpets called to boot and saddle. And

shortly—for the Hungarian levies were disciplined enough when fighting was at hand—some three battalions of foot were steadily arrayed under the silver moonlight in the wide court of honour; further away, in the night, was heard the champing of horses in long lines; still further, down the road rattled and rumbled the ordnance train already on the move.

At last, besides the guests, the prisoners and my motionless warder, there remained none in the room but the Valkyrie (I could never think of her by any other name) and the beplumed volunteer general. To him, at one time, she spoke inquiringly, pointing with marked significance in the direction of her sister. I guessed the ferocious question. But the man, all engrossed by the present juncture, merely looked round unseeingly, and his eyes reverted to the papers in his hand. At that moment yet another messenger entered the hall, a peasant of the plains in the white smock of his class, who had that to announce which made the general start in anger and hurriedly seek his charger.

The last to leave us was the Valkyrie. She stood still some moments and looked round pensively at the white group of women in the distant end; then, reluctantly, she walked away with clanking spurs.

A few moments later, from the dark masses of men gathered in front of the Castle, rose, like the firing of a powder train ending in explosion, the soaring "*Eljen*" of the Nationalists, as the general galloped past the ranks with the usual words of patriotic exultation. And in ten minutes, to the blood-stirring strains of the Rakoczy March, the partisan force had marched forth: marched on its way to annihilation. For this was the dawn of the 23rd of July, 1849, when the long spell of fitful Hungarian victories was broken by the first successful surprise action on our side, completed by Russian pursuit.

In the Castle of Komjáth, as the twilight of returning day warmed from siluer to gold, none were left but the sick and the serving-women as before, together with the gaily attired ladies who had been ordered to attend the dance, and who now waited for their carriages—waited in vain, for all horses and coachmen had been impressed by the guerrilla. Even the sentry placed over my precious body with such strict injunctions had been unable to resist the wild cheering, and was no doubt now tramping with his comrades and eagerly scenting the fight from afar.

In the house there was all but complete silence. Just as the sun in his splendour peered at us over the hill-top between two

poplar-trees, dazzling our tired eyes, yet greeting them as a joyous omen, there rolled through the window on the wing of the breeze the distant boom of cannon; and, not many minutes later, the faint crepitation of musketry began to be heard, varied at times by the more formal rattle of volleys. And we knew that the momentous struggle had begun.

Some of the women were on their knees.

Still in her corner the Countess sat apart and silent, with her youngest child on her knee, watching the others as they slept on the sofa. As for me, as I noted the great blue circles of exhaustion under her eyes, and the stamp of the terrible strain on her drawn features, cold shivers of impotent fury ran the length of my spine. With what fervour I yearned for bodily strength, for a sturdy horse with which to meet on fair terms, sword in hand, our insolent victors of an hour ago!

In such outer stillness and inner turmoil of thought—varied for me at least, for I believe I was at moments light-headed, by intervals of dreaminess—did the morning pass away. Out of this state of things we were awakened by returning commotion in the outer world. I was glued to my chair by weakness; but I remember that, as the sound of horses neared the house, the Countess started to her feet and with the crying child in her arms ran to the

balcony. There was a ghastly look of renewed terror on her face; but after she had peered out for a moment under her slender jewelled hand, it suddenly changed to one of overpowering joy.

And presently clanging military footsteps resounded again at the door. A burly major of Uhlans entered with an adjutant. The two men stood one moment on the threshold staring angrily at the unsparing display of the rebel tricolour and the signs of recent festiveness in the room, and next the Major was towering in front of my chair, eyeing me with an appalling look, and severely demanding an explanation concerning the presence of an Imperial officer amidst such surroundings.

I rose by a desperate effort, with a sickly attempt at cavalry smartness; but the change of posture was fatal, and I slid down on the parquet floor. After this I recollect nothing for that day, except noticing in one returning glimmer of consciousness, as I was escorted away, that the body of the grey-headed steward—already some hours dead to judge from his limply pendent feet—was swinging under the gateway, and that five noosed ropes, still awaiting their burdens, dangled side by side from the same beam!

The posthumous testimony of the faithful old servant corroborating what to a regular

soldier must have seemed at first an utterly incredible tale, no doubt saved the Countess from many unmerited troubles at the hands of her very saviours.

But saviours they really proved. A few days later came the news of the incomprehensible surrender at Vilagos; that sudden betrayal of the indomitable Hungarian army by Görgey—Görgey already traitor to his King, traitor in the end to his own chosen side—which put an end to the National movement.

Then began, as we all know, the period of ruthless and injudicious Austrian persecution which for so many years kept alive a burning hatred between the two nations.

It was, however, with a feeling that "poetical" justice had had its course in one case at least, that I learned, soon after my return to duty, that Nagy-Sandor and his staff —among which was the partisan general who had ordered the Death-Dance festivities at Komjáth—had been hanged with little ceremony by General Haynau soon after the fall of Comorn.

All this is matter of history. What still appertains to the present relation is the influence of that far-off incident on the course of my life.

The chain was reconnected only some seventeen years later, in that well-known year of

happy forgiveness and reconciliation, when the Kaiser was at last crowned King of Hungary, in his Hungarian capital. I had just left the Imperial service, the immediate cause of this change being an unexpected succession to the Bycross estate. Now, although the event was welcome enough, there was in my thoughts an under-current of sadness at leaving for ever the old regiment in which I had served almost a score of years and which was none the less glorious, indeed was almost all the dearer to me, for that most of its later service had been associated with defeat.

Before returning to England, on my way back from Pesth, strangely impressed with the barbaric splendours of the coronation, more especially with the marvellous sight of the Magyars' enthusiasm in their restored loyalty to their King, I yielded to an irresistible desire to re-visit the nefarious neighbourhood of Comorn. Riding at leisure, master of my own time, I wended my way from the Apáli woods through the rich and peaceful land of Neutra, and pushed as far as the well-remembered strategic bridge of Komjáth.

Over its sounding stones I passed once more and reined in to contemplate the scene. Just the same despite the lapse of years, save for a more prosperous appearance. In the court of honour, amid the heavy laden rose-trees near

the walls, fluttered the white dress of a lady attended by maids in the bright national costume: the whole land at that time was airing its national jubilation.

I boldly entered, and to my question whether the Countess still lived at the Castle—

"There is the gracious lady herself," answered the gate-keeper reverentially. He took my horse, and I advanced hat in hand.

Although much aged in face, she was still alert and beautiful, and I knew her at once. But she, of course, could not recognise in the mature Rittmeister who, unannounced, was thus invading her ground, the callow boy that in the old distressful days a Russian ambulance had dropped at her door; she eyed me with courteous inquiry.

"Can the Countess," I asked, "in these times of fraternal reconciliation, recall to mind a certain great ball at Castle Komjáth, where one Cornet Ainsdale, so nearly the cause of irreparable mischief, had the honour to attend?"

Before the end of my phrase the look of polite affability in the lady's eyes had given place to amazement and pleasure. She dropped the gathered roses with a joyful exclamation and extended both her hands.

And thus for the second time I found myself the guest of Komjáth. And again, though

under no precarious conditions, I remained a long while. And when I left I bore away with me one of that warm-hearted household to connect for ever the variegated past with the happy present—Luise, the little dark-eyed messenger of yore. But this is forestalling.

As we walked towards the entrance, talking of course of the tragic days of old, there appeared in the distance a slender young woman who rode with admirable grace a long-tailed black horse.

"Does Major Ainsdale," asked my hostess, mimicking my words of self-introduction, "recollect a very tiny child who passed most of that night of emotion in her mother's arms, little conscious of being so near death on the gallows? There she comes—Luise."

But, when I looked under the new-comer's felt hat, I nearly called aloud. There was before my eyes my Valkyrie again! The same oval face with its ardent pallor, the same lustrous dark eyes which so long had haunted my memory. The same, yet not the same. For, as smiling and blushing, the rider acknowledged our introduction, the image of the set, revengeful Amazon of my recollections melted for ever into a radiant vision of sweet and timid maidenhood. And I have never seen it again these thirty years until it was evoked again by the transient flash of the matchlight.

My hostess read my thoughts instantly.

"Luise reminds you of some one else," she exclaimed. "Ah! it will please you no doubt to meet again the original," she added laughingly, "who lives with us, and is here now—fresh returned from the crowning festivities at Pesth."

I looked at her amazed, hardly realising amidst the fresh memories of the surroundings the meaning of her words.

When we moved into the great hall which I knew so well, we found there a rather stout, middle-aged, good-natured, and cosy-looking woman, engaged in presiding over the afternoon coffee, and distributing good things to several young people in a most motherly manner.

To this personage, in whom I could not trace the smallest likeness to the relentless leader of men I had first seen by powder light, I was introduced by the Countess (with just a shadow of sly emphasis) as having been a witness of certain critical events in the terrible year.

I kissed her hand—that hand which would have tied the noose round her sister's neck, and the children's little innocent weasands—I was like a man in a dream; there was no connecting her with the beautiful and relentless Valkyrie of my boyish days.

She was affable and apparently unconcerned, though during the course of the meal she paused once with the bread-knife half through

the loaf she was slicing, gazing into void as if in a profound day-dream.

It was only later, when she had stretched herself in an arm-chair and was puffing at a long Virginia, whilst the smallest grand-nephew, who was her special pet, sat on her broad lap and watched with delight the opal cloud issuing from her lips, that we fairly broached again the chapter of reminiscences.

Opposite to us, the Countess, with her daughter by her side, was embroidering some piece of work in the now legalised and ubiquitous national tints, and smilingly listening to the fitful talk.

I mentioned, in time, to the retired Amazon the five ropes hanging under the portal—my last recollection of that eventful day.

"Do you not wish," I asked, "that you could efface those dreadful times from your memory, or at least do you not feel thankful that they are now buried so far away in the past?"

For awhile she answered nought, but musingly caressed the child's fair hair whilst a wistful smile played on her lips. Then she drew a sigh deep from her heavy bosom, kissed the boy, and put him on his feet.

"Ah!" she said with an effort, as if putting the thought aside, "I was young then."

During the whole of my stay there the subject was never alluded to again.

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